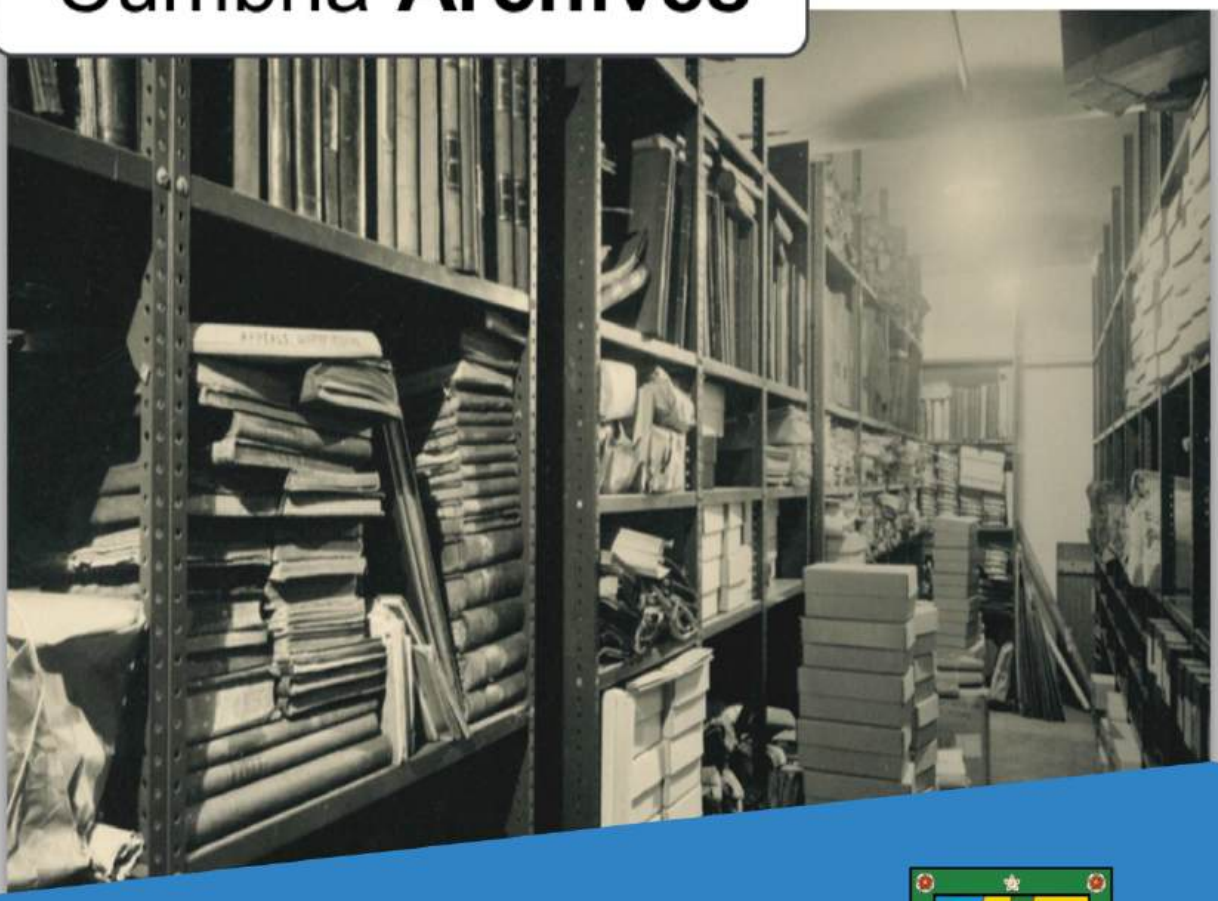
Cumbria **Archives**



Cumbria Archives

Newsletter

Summer 2026

Cumberland Council

Westmorland & Furness Council

Working for **Cumberland Council** and **Westmorland & Furness Council**

cumbriaarchives.org.uk

Contents

Page number

Welcome to Cumbria Archives
Robert Baxter & Erika Freyr 3

Upcoming Events 8

Barrow Archives Update
Hazel Gatford & Joanne Robson 9

"Writing Under stress" the meaning and materiality of pauper letters.
Professor Steven King & Dr Peter Jones 16

Conservation and Digitisation Update
Erika Freyr 24

Carlisle Archives Update
Michael Stephens & Kelda Roe 28

Kendal Archives Update
Anthony Hughes & Joanne Robson 31

How to avoid tracing paper confetti
Dr Claire Dean 34

Mining Research: My experience in Whitehaven Archives
Mike McCrickard 37

Whitehaven Archives Update
Diane Hodgson & Darren Ferrier 38

From Our Volunteers 43

Carmen Cid Santibañez
Dr Rob David 44

Spotlight On... DX 595/3 Novelty postcards 45

Cumbria Archives Opening Times 46

Welcome to Cumbria Archives

Robert Baxter and Erika Freyr

A farewell to Kendal County Offices

This summer marks a significant milestone in the story of Cumbria Archives as we leave our long-used archive accommodation at Kendal County Offices.

This is an attractive neo-Georgian civic building constructed between 1937 and 1939 for Westmorland County Council by local builders G F Martindale to the designs of architect Verner O. Rees. The building (simply known locally as 'County Hall') contains some notable internal Art Deco features as well as a Cold War civil defence control bunker. It opened for staff and public use in September 1939, and as the country had already entered war at this point, no official opening ceremony was held.

The county council had previously stored its historic records in the accommodation at Kendal Town Hall which it shared with the borough council and other local authorities. The county moved its records to County Offices in January 1940 and there they remained until May 2026. Over the years, the records accommodation outgrew the original strongroom (known to archive staff as 'strongroom one') constructed within the building. Additional storage areas were gradually brought into use, creating a complex of strongrooms on the lower ground floor as well as an external store in a former school meals kitchen (since demolished) opposite the Kendal police station. The county council made its records available to researchers at County Offices from 1940 but without the benefit of any specialist staff until the creation of the Joint Archive Service of Cumberland, Carlisle and Westmorland in the early 1960s. The Kendal

Strongroom 1, Kendal Archives 1960s

Strongroom 1 empty, April 2026

Record Office, under archivist Sheila Macpherson, and the Carlisle Record Office at Carlisle Castle became the first two offices of the joint service.

In July 2024, Westmorland and Furness Council announced the closure of County Offices to staff and the public, as all staff except archives, were transferred to South Lakeland House. In March 2026, the Kendal Archive Centre searchroom, relocated since Autumn 2024 to the Herdwick Room at Kendal Library, closed to the public to allow staff to assist with the relocation of all records stored at County Offices. We removed a few collections to Barrow Archives and to our outstore near Carlisle. The majority of collections were moved to the specialist DeepStore facility in Winsford, Cheshire. Located within a working salt mine, DeepStore provides highly secure storage with exceptionally stable environmental conditions, making it well suited to the long-term preservation of archives. The facility is used by The National Archives and many other heritage organisations.

Looking ahead

We are aiming to restart our public service in Kendal in August 2026, with regular retrievals of records from DeepStore to Kendal Library. Westmorland and Furness Council will begin a public consultation and engagement process regarding the future of archive and museum services in Kendal. The Council announced that it was seeking disposal of County Offices in early 2026, and its future use remains uncertain at the time of writing.

The move from County Offices also marks a bittersweet moment for me personally. County Offices was the place I first researched original archives as an undergraduate in the 1980s, and the place where I began my archival career as a volunteer and then a member of staff in the 1990s.

However, we recognise the restrictions both in terms of public access and quality of archive storage that working in County Offices imposed.

Rolled plans and packaged documents ready for transfer to DeepStore, April 2026

Strongroom 5 before and after, April 2026

It is time to move on, and to look forward to a brighter future for heritage and archives in Kendal. We look forward to welcoming researchers back to our Kendal service soon and to working with local communities to help shape plans for the future of archives and heritage services in Kendal.

Robert Baxter, Senior Archivist

Celebrating Our Volunteers and Supporting Research Across Cumbria Archives

The removal from County Hall took up a lot of our time across the service, but it didn't stop us from continuing to preserve the stories of our communities, through the centuries of records that we hold.

Wherever we store them, from family history and local businesses to public services, industry, and community life, the collections held by the team at Cumbria Archives are an invaluable resource for residents, researchers and visitors.

This year, to cope with the additional pressures, we made some changes to our volunteer offer. We hope this will allow us to make the most of our incredibly dedicated volunteers, while giving our teams a chance to manage the workload. So, after a break to train our new staff, Barrow Archives welcomed back the regular volunteers just after Easter, and Whitehaven has modified the offer so all their volunteers are working on a single project, with a view to getting those crew lists finished.

Conservation were able to host a few short student placements this year, including two from the DREAM placement scheme, alongside the tireless PROB conservation, digitisation, and repacking project. Lastly, the archive volunteers at Carlisle continue to turn up some amazing stories as they work through the crew manifests held there.

We are very lucky to have our volunteers, who have a wide range of interests and skills to bring us.

Across the four centres, our volunteers assist with a wide range of activities, including cataloguing, indexing, and transcribing documents, and helping with digitisation and collections care projects. Their work helps make historic records more accessible and ensures that future generations can benefit from the rich documentary heritage of Cumbria.

By giving their time to preserve and share local history, our volunteers demonstrate what it means to be collaborative, working alongside archive staff to achieve far more than would be possible alone. Through innovative projects that use digital technology to open collections more accessibly to wider audiences, they empower people and community groups to find a sense of place and pride. Most importantly, their generosity and dedication show a compassionate commitment to preserving our shared heritage for everyone to enjoy.

Researchers from universities across the UK and beyond regularly visit our archive centres to access our records, and these records inform dissertations, academic publications, exhibitions, and community-led heritage projects. Every indexed record, catalogued collection and digitised document helps researchers discover new connections and tell new stories about Cumbria's past.

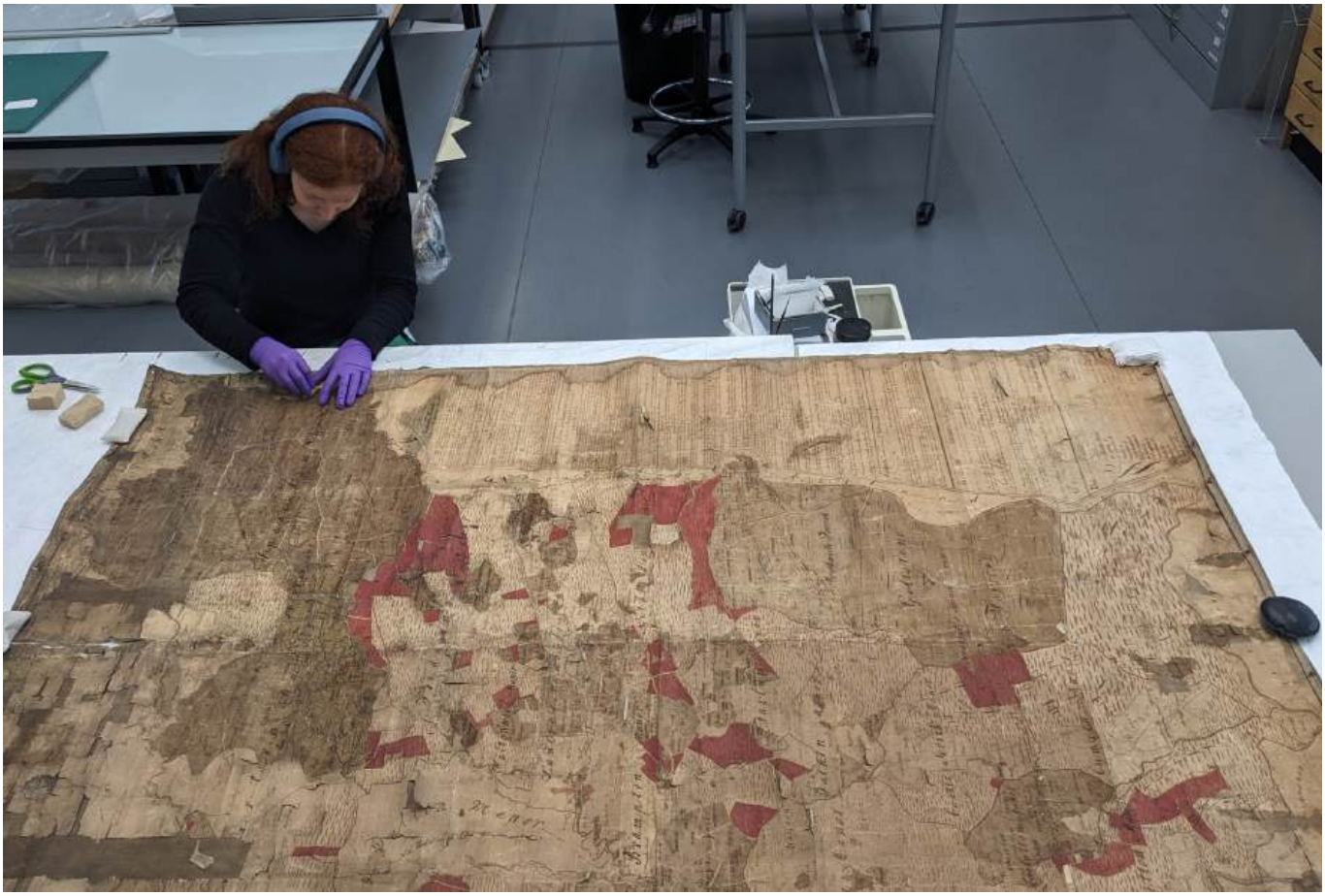
The success of Cumbria Archives is built on partnership between staff, volunteers, researchers and local communities. Together, they help ensure that our documentary heritage remains accessible, relevant and inspiring.

As we work, we are proud of the role our staff and volunteers play in safeguarding our history and supporting research that deepens understanding of our communities. To our volunteers: your contribution

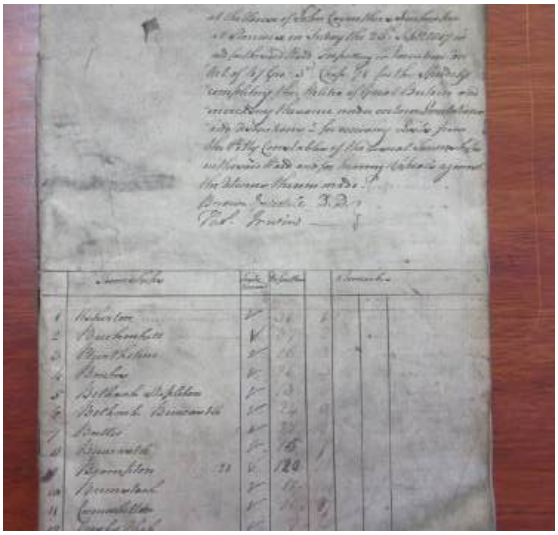
is a gift, and we would like to take this opportunity to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone who gives their time, skills and enthusiasm to support the archive service.

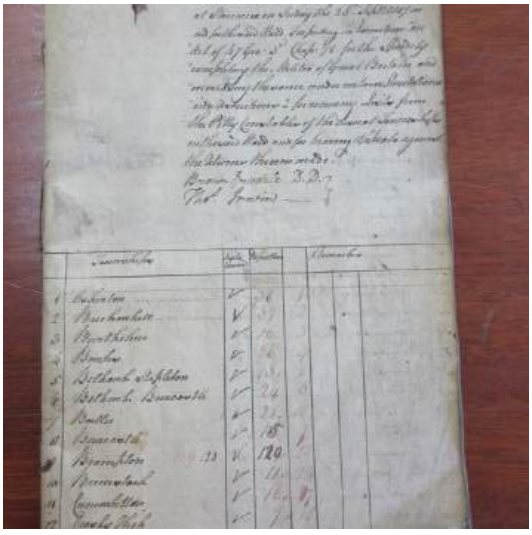
As Cumbria Archives looks ahead, the past year demonstrates a service that is working hard not only to preserve history but actively supporting research, learning and community engagement across the county.

Erika Freyr, Senior Conservator



Conservation repair work





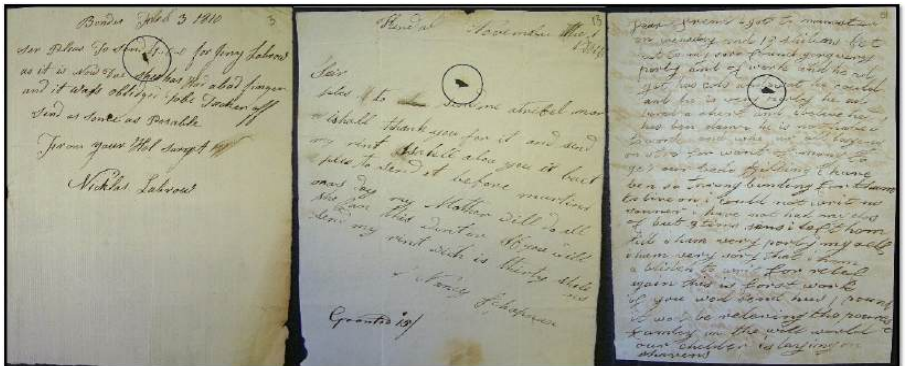
Cleaning Militia ballot lists, before (l) and after (r)

Upcoming Events

“Writing Under Stress”: the meaning and materiality of pauper letters

Free workshops provided by Nottingham Trent University in association with Cumbria Archives

Wednesday 16 September 2026 and Thursday 17 September 2026, 10 AM to 4 PM, at the Conference Room, Stricklandgate House, 92 Stricklandgate, Kendal LA9 4PU



Pauper Letters are a fascinating historical source. They were written in their thousands by paupers to apply for, or negotiate the terms of, relief under the old poor law in England and Wales (1601-1834). Join our team of specialists for a one-day workshop when we will truly get ‘under the skin’ of these enigmatic documents, looking at materials and methods of construction, and exploring what they can tell us about past lives and popular literacy.

The Writing Under Stress team:

- Professor Steven King, Historian, Nottingham Trent University
- Dr Paul Garside, Conservation Scientist, University of Glasgow
- Dr Peter Jones, Historian, Nottingham Trent University

The workshop on 16 September 2026 is suitable for enthusiasts at all levels of experience. The workshop on 17 September 2026 is particularly suitable for those with an interest in conservation science, archive practice, and cross-disciplinary approaches to historical sources. However, no particular specialism or expertise is required to attend.

Booking is by Eventbrite only, see our website “News” section for links.

Barrow Archives Update

Hazel Gatford and Joanne Robson, Archivists

Recent Accessions

Barrow Archive Centre has continued to receive a steady stream of new accessions. Some highlights include a further 6 boxes added to the James Fisher and Sons Limited collection, BDB 89. This accession includes additional material relating to the company but also to Sir John Fisher and Lady Maria Fisher (née Maria Elsner 1905-1983, who had been an acclaimed singer and actress prior to her marriage). It includes personal photograph albums, newspaper cutting albums, correspondence, passports and printed material.

BD 89 Launch of Brathay Fisher

BDLK Lowick Hall Estate

We were approached last year by the owner of Lowick Hall who not only deposited the Lowick Hall records in his possession but was keen to instigate the transfer of the Lowick manorial records held at Lancashire Archives. Lancashire Archives were amenable for this to happen, so early this year the Lowick manorial records were reunited with the estate records for the first time since the 1970s and all are now available here in Barrow under reference BDLK.

We recently received proof copies of two books by William Rollinson (1937-2000) with annotations by the author – *Life and Tradition in the Lake District*, and *Dictionary of Cumbrian Dialect, Tradition and Folklore*, BDX 993. Rollinson, who was born in Barrow, became a leading historical geographer of the Lake District, publishing several highly regarded books.

BDSO 180
Ulverston Trades Council
Rules and standing orders and handbook for officers
1950-1976

BDP 202
Photograph: Higher Grade School staff, Barrow-in-Furness, featuring group of school staff including master 'Boss' Harris
1928

BDX 982
Ulverston, a study by J A Moore
An individual study completed at Loughborough Training College on aspects of Ulverston geology, history, development and industry. Illustrated with photographs
1955

BDSO 91
Egton Cum Newland Women's Institute
Meeting record books 1997-2008; Committee minute books 1995-2008; annual financial statements 1986-2010 [gaps]; transcripts of annual reports 1945-2007 [gaps]

BDX 983
Booklets: Visit of the Iron and Steel Institute to Barrow-in-Furness 1903, published by Barrow News and Mail Ltd; Some notes on the history of Valley Cold Blast Pig Iron, Charcoal Iron Co Ltd Backbarrow [mid 20th century]

BA/CEM
Barrow Cemetery: Grave grant books 1874-1980; grant receipt books 1874-1979

BDX 984
Title deeds for a customary hold dwellinghouse and garden situated behind the Church, Dalton-in-Furness
1823-1836

BLC/PH
Booklets and town guides relating to Barrow-in-Furness King's Silver Jubilee visit to Barrow Town Hall souvenir brochure, 1935
1935-1986

BDX 890/12
Gillian NB Thompson, nuclear scientist of Barrow-in-Furness: Well House letters
Well House, Bletchley was the childhood home of Gillian NB Thompson. The letters are written by John William Jones and Eliza Jones of Well House, great grandparents of Gillian N B Thompson
1885-1900

BDFC
South-West Cumbria Methodist Circuit Records
Minutes, financial and miscellaneous papers of various churches
1942-2011

BDSO 40
Barrow Manx Society
Agendas and minutes of Annual General Meetings 1979-2019, meeting minute books (3) 1979-1983, 1983-1991, 1993-2005, account book (annual balances) 1979-2019

BDX 989
Minute book of Satterthwaite Sports committee 1944-1957; copy photographs (some collected by John Marsh)

of views around Satterthwaite and Satterthwaite and Rusland School pupils (many identified) c1900-1938; copy Fourth Annual Report of Colton, Rusland and Satterthwaite Nursing Association Jan 1931; copy recipe book of recipes collected from named local inhabitants (Satterthwaite Tips and Dainty Delicacies Our Own Cookery Book & Household Hints) 1929-1931; copy restoration statement of accounts of All Saints Church, Satterthwaite, 1914-1915

BDSO 200

Friends of Furness Hospital

Photographs, slides, programmes relating to Barrow Carnival 1971-1993; Infield Carnival programmes and photographs 1950s; Ulverston Carnival slides 1973; Kirvin House photographs, guest book and coaster, 1986.

BDX 990

Her Majesty's Theatre, Barrow-in-Furness souvenir programme celebrating the quatercentenary of William Shakespeare's birth and the centenary of Her Majesty's Theatre. For performances of Hamlet and The Merchant of Venice, as well as The Rivals by R B Sheridan and See How They Run by Philip King. Includes autographs of members of the cast

1964

BDSO 121

Greenlane Archaeology Ltd, Ulverston

Archaeological reports/ heritage statements etc for the Furness area

2020-2026

BDX 992

Margery Brunskill theatre programmes and production photographs

A collection of programmes of local amateur dramatic society productions and cast photographs 1940s-1960s collected by Margery Brunskill, who often features as a cast member, including productions by Barrow Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society and Abbey Musical Society.

1949-1960s

Cataloguing

Box listing of the James Fisher and Sons Limited, BDB 89, a Barrow in Furness shipping company has been completed including the new accession. Now the process of identifying and organising the photographs of the company's hundreds of ships is underway.

Cataloguing of the Cartmel Deeds within BDKF/C has been fascinating and has led Liz to complete training with the National Archives on Charter and Deeds last month where Cumbria Archives received a couple of mentions for good practice in its cataloguing of deeds in the archive! (See article overleaf.)

Hazel Gatford,

Archivist

Staff Training from The National Archives

Identifying and Understanding Pre-Modern Records

The National Archives provides support, information and training for researchers and professionals working in the archive sector, and I have been taking part in their latest series of four lunchtime webinars, *Identifying and Understanding Pre-Modern Records*, led by record specialists.

These sessions offer a comprehensive introduction to the range of pre-modern records found in local and national archives. As an Archive Assistant at Barrow Archive Centre, I have attended two of the sessions so far and will complete the series in September and October.

The first session, *Charters and Deeds*, provided an overview of royal charters, charters and deeds—what they are, what survives centrally and locally, how to read and understand them, key Latin phrases, and how to find the grantor, grantee, and content of a deed. Royal Charters are recorded on charter rolls produced by the medieval chancery from the 13th century onwards, and that the Calendar of Charter Rolls volumes list each charter in chronological order from Henry III (1226) to Henry VIII (1516), providing either a full transcript or a summary.

They explored how deeds document the legal ownership and transfer of property, land, money, rents, and rights. The session covered different types of deeds, the key phrases to look for, and how to search for or catalogue them within a collection—either by looking for specific types such as quitclaims or feoffments, or by carrying out a more general search. Examples from Cumbria Archives were shared as good practice, and I noted that a simple keyword search for "deeds" produced over 17,640 references.

The second session, *Seals*, was a fascinating introduction to the history and variety of seals, including their origins, uses, identification, and best storage practices. The National Archives holds over 250,000 seals dating back to the seal of William I (1066–87), including royal, government, colonial,

Reference	Title	Description	Date	Archive centre
BDB 42/109	Feoffment 14 February 1803	1. Joseph Salthouse of Mountbarrow, parish of Ulverstone, Lancashire, yeoman. Elizah Salthouse of...	1803	Barrow

Reference	Title	Description	Date	Archive centre
BDFELL/2/3	Quitclaim	Regarding the payment of a legacy to John Gregg, glover of Kirkby Lonsdale, Westmorland and...	23 Feb 1709	Barrow

Examples of key phrases to search, CASCAT

ecclesiastical, monastic, topographical, equestrian, and personal examples, all of which can be searched through the Seals Card Index and Digitised Seals Register.

I discovered that seals were used before signatures to authorise and authenticate documents, often incorporating images or symbols to convey status or political meaning. For example, the second Great Seal of Elizabeth I includes the Irish harp to represent her claim to Ireland, while other imagery—such as thrones, lilies, or books—symbolised authority, purity, or learning. As social hierarchies developed, the nobility created seals in imitation of royal ones, and the Church used distinctive oval or vestry-shaped seals for ecclesiastical institutions. During the Middle Ages, seals were used across all levels of society; people from poorer backgrounds could pay to use the seals of professional classes to validate documents on their behalf. Meanwhile, the monarchy developed specialised seals for different roles within the royal household, such as the Seal of William de Farlee, Keeper of the Wardrobe during the reign of Richard II.

After these two fascinating sessions, I am now looking forward to attending the upcoming webinars on *Manorial Documents* and *Wills* in the autumn.

Liz North, Archives Assistant

CA/1/2 Charter of Edward II 12 May 1316

CA/1/2 close-up of seal

A walk around Hindpool (with audio)

An immersive experience at the click of a button

Until the mid-19th century, Hindpool was a rural part of the parish of Dalton-in-Furness. The land was drained and farmed by lay brothers associated with Furness Abbey. After the dissolution of the monastery, the land passed to the Crown but continued to be farmed. From the 1850s Ordnance Survey map you can see it is little more than a single farm.

Hindpool and Barrow, 1850s Ordnance Survey Map

In 1851, iron-ore was discovered near Askam and the Industrial Revolution came to Hindpool. By 1859 the Hindpool Iron and Steel Works had opened. The area became increasingly industrial and urban with houses for the workers and associated services.

This walk around Hindpool is devised to draw your attention to some of the historical and architectural gems in the area.

Although you can do the circular walk in any way you want, and in either direction, the usual starting point is St Mary's Roman Catholic Church on Duke Street. The walk then takes you clockwise past the old location of the Barrow and Calcutta Jute Company mill, past St James Church, the Drill Hall and Territorial Army Centre and then down Abbey Road. Abbey Road has many listed buildings and a number of these are described on the walk, including Ramsden Baths, and the old School of Science

BOROUGH OF BARROW-IN-FURNESS.

OPENING OF BATHS IN ABBEY ROAD.

The Public are respectfully informed that the above

BATHS

WILL BE

OPENED

FOR THE SEASON, ON

FRIDAY THE 1ST MAY

Next, at Twelve o'clock Noon;

And will be Open Daily (Sundays excepted) from Twelve to Nine o'clock in the Afternoon.

TERMS---3d. EACH.

Purchasers of Seven Tickets may have them for the price of Six.

BY ORDER,

C. F. PRESTON, Town Clerk.

Municipal Offices, 25th April, 1874.

J. MILNER, PRINTER, &c., CORNWALLIS-STREET, BARROW.

BA/C/3/14/2 Ramsdens Baths was opened to the public May 1874

and Art (now the Nan Tait Building). The walk finishes at the Grade II listed Barrow Library on Ramsden Square.

The walk takes about an hour to complete and has 17 stopping points. The online software works with any smartphone, and the walk can be accessed via the QR Code below.

Cumbria Archives would like to express their gratitude to North West Sound Heritage for use of the software to create the trail.

Joanne Robson, Archivist

Helen Leech, Digitisation Technician

Researcher's Contribution

"Writing Under Stress": the meaning and materiality of pauper letters

Professor Steven King, Nottingham Trent University &
Dr Peter Jones, Nottingham Trent University

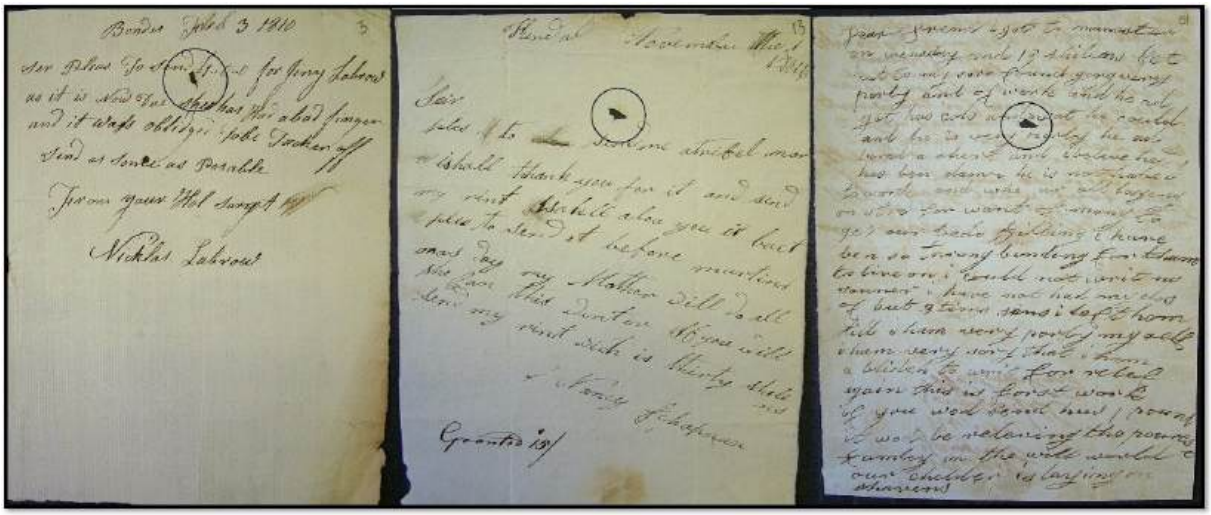
The 'History from Below' movement has long powered the search for versions of the authentic, 'ordinary' voice. We probably cannot get more 'below' than the poor who applied for welfare under the English and Welsh Old Poor Law (1601-1834). While many such claims were made in person, increasingly over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the destitute poor wrote letters (or had them written by others) to justify their appeals. Cumbria Archives have many such letters and look after the internationally significant collection of Kirkby Lonsdale.

The Old Poor Law of 1601 made ecclesiastical parishes responsible for the relief of their resident poor. Newly created officers (overseers) and oversight ratepayer bodies (vestries) were to raise a local property tax to generate local resources for these poor people. Like so much in the history of welfare, things did not go as planned, legislated for, or expected once intentions came into contact with reality. Because parishes were made responsible for their *resident* poor, the desperate or smart naturally gravitated towards places that had the most money to give out. Those places complained endlessly about being overwhelmed, calling on the government to 'do something'.

That 'something' was the 'Settlement Laws' of the 1660s, which established the criteria whereby every person in England/Wales would have a place of belonging/settlement. Here they could make a claim for welfare, though actually granting it remained entirely discretionary on the part of the parish. Settlement might be through birth, serving an apprenticeship, marriage, or a range of other potential criteria. This worked when people did not move from their settlements, but by the later eighteenth century the tri-partite processes of urbanisation, industrialisation, and agricultural revolution were displacing people. Slowly at first but then gathering pace, families began to find themselves out of their 'place' when they fell into poverty.

What, then, to do in such circumstances?

Poor people could of course walk or get other transport to their place of settlement (or, as they often called it, 'home'). Alternatively, they might get someone else to do the journey for them or send a note via someone else who happened to be



Three letters from the Kirkby Lonsdale collection showing the 'spindle' or 'Spike' hole (1810, 1816, and 1824)

travelling back 'home'. Or, if they could write or get someone to write for them, the poor person could send a letter to overseers, making their case in writing. When literacy was relatively low, and paper, ink and postage were expensive – as in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – the writing option may well have been the last one considered. This was even more likely to be the case where getting the small change that was often requested was in itself a hard task given episodic shortages of such coins and the costs and difficulty of getting it from one place to another.

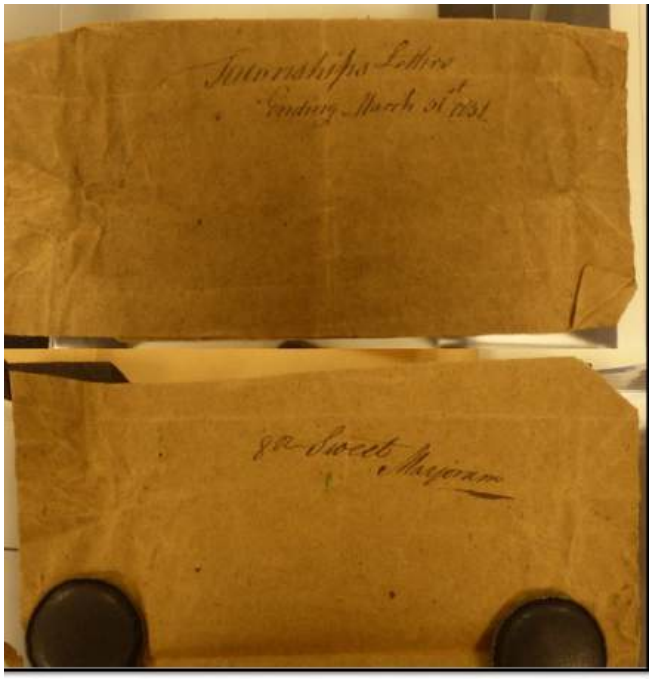
But by the later eighteenth -century many of these conditions were changing: small change was easier to get; people were more literate than we could ever have thought; paper was becoming cheaper; postage options expanding. Once we get into the early nineteenth century these trends accelerated. It is for this reason that we see a surge in pauper letter writing from the later eighteenth-century, and why the Cumbrian collections exist.

The presence of these sources in the modern archive is patchy, though it is surprising that they survive at all given that they are generally unbound and thus subject to all sorts of casual discarding and re-use practices. We get some clues about the nature of serendipity here. The Kirkby Lonsdale collection comprises more than a thousand letters, whereas in some collections perhaps only a handful survive.

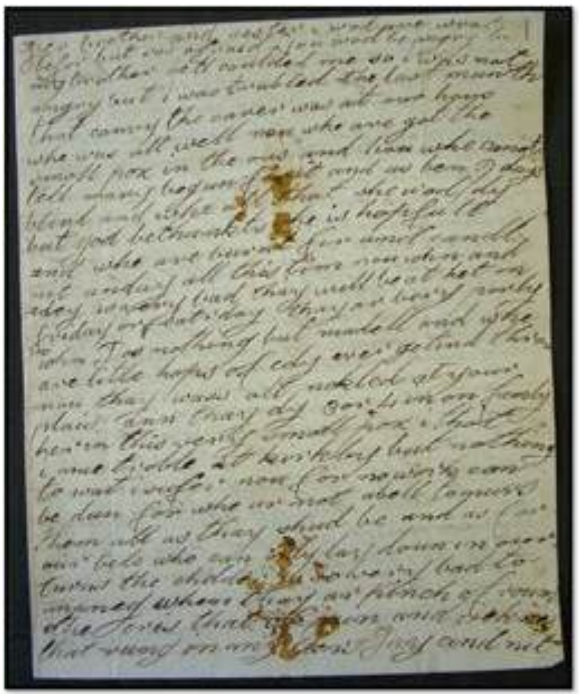
The image above shows that the overseer, Stephen Garnett, clearly 'filed' each item by putting it onto a (likely metal) pin, often called a 'spindle' or 'spike'. The piercing marks are clearly visible. Garnett then collected the letters together and carefully wrapped them in a protective covering.

This second image captures the re-use of material for this task, with text related to its previous use clearly visible on the reverse: Garnett was a grocer, and it seems that this paper had previously been used as wrapping or storage for sweet marjoram.

Nationally, the Old Poor Law and its officials were subject to the same generic pressures – people out of their place; the need to correspond with other officials and advocates; the need to get and remember intelligence on paupers; and the need to transmit money – and this necessarily means that all poor law archives would once have looked something like that for Kirkby Lonsdale in terms of scale and complexity.



'Recycled' wrapping used by Stephen Garnett, grocer and overseer of Kirkby Lonsdale, to store township letters (1831)

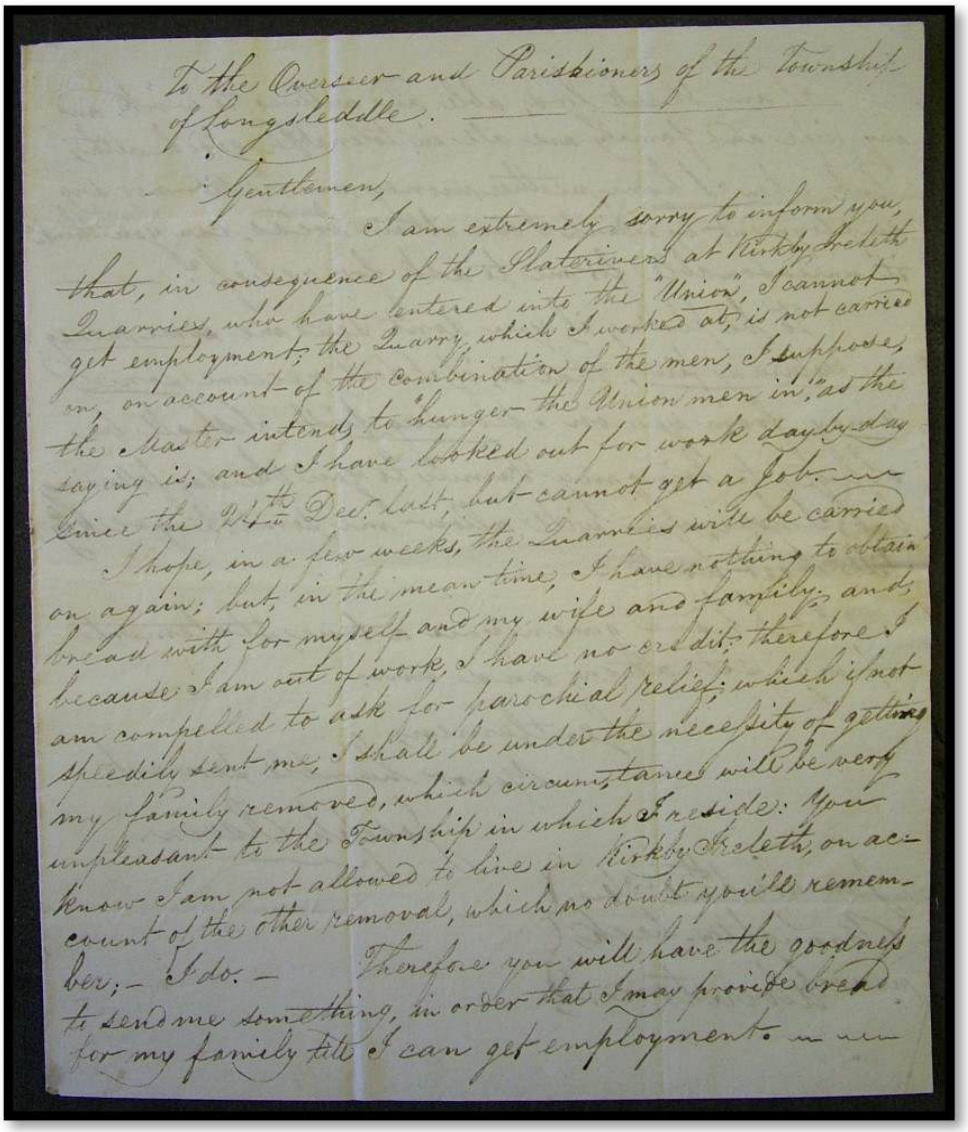


Amos Salkeld (unsigned) to John Dotson, his Brother, in Kirkby Lonsdale, 11 January 1824 (Cumbria Archive Service, WPR19/7/6/17/1)

In turn, a comprehensive collection like Kirkby Lonsdale's includes letters written by poor people in their own hands, some written by community-based 'scribes', the letters of advocates, correspondence by officials and sometimes even family letters that fell into the hands of overseers and were preserved. The image below is a letter from Amos Salkeld to his brother, and a good instance of the randomness of the archive.

The opening lines read: 'Der brother and sester i wod ave wrot befor but was afraid you wod be angry [**] [*illegible*] my brother sell coulded me so i was not angry but i was trubled'. You will see that the writing is orthographic (writing as speaking), has no spelling or punctuation and is barely literate. Surprisingly often, officials, advocates, and paupers themselves exhibit this very tenuous grasp on literacy. But, it was still literacy.

Researcher's Contribution



To the Overseer and Parishioners of the Township of Longsleddle.

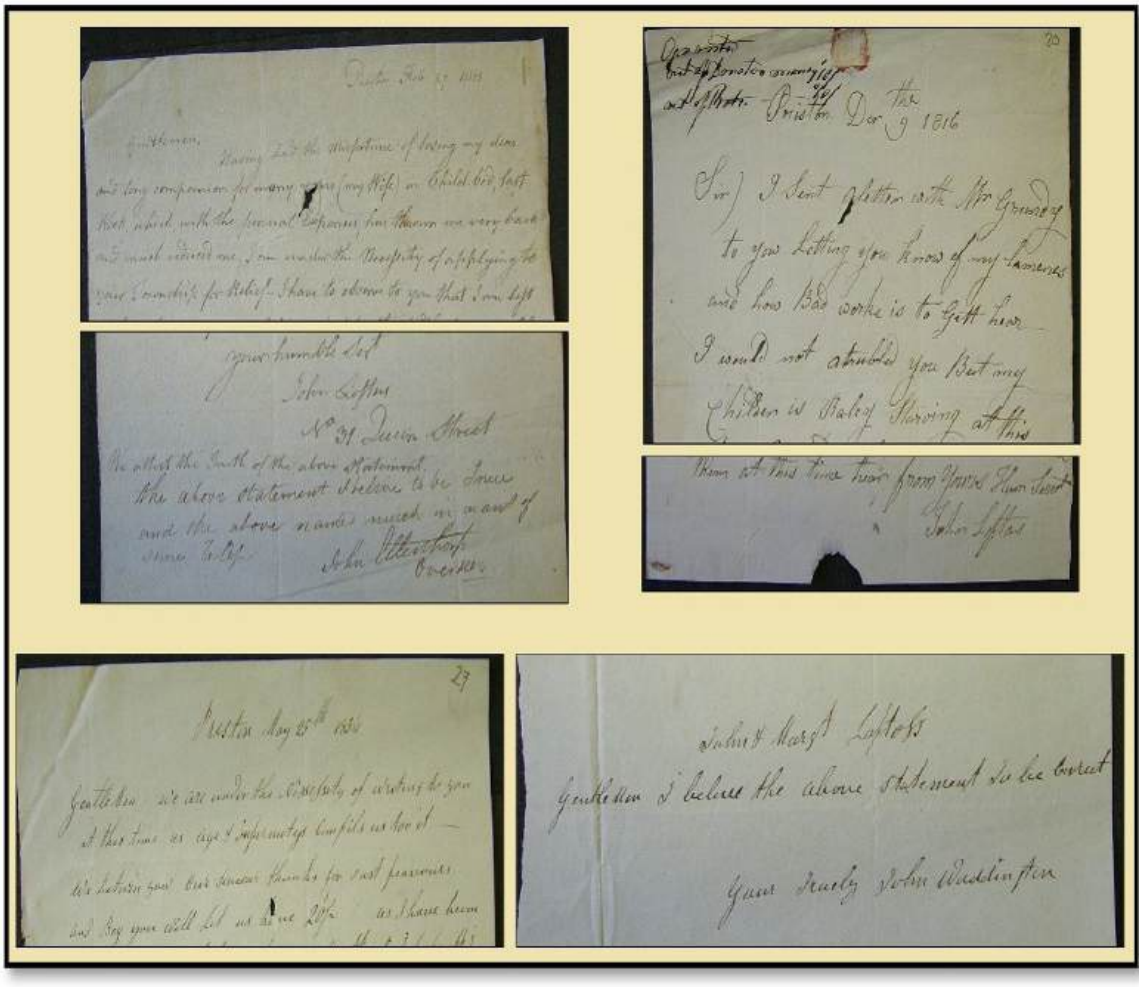
Gentlemen,

I am extremely sorry to inform you, that, in consequence of the Slaterivers at Kirkby Irelith Quarries, who have entered into the "Union", I cannot get employment, the Quarry, which I worked at, is not carried on, on account of the combination of the men, I suppose, the Master intends to 'hunger the Union men in', as the saying is; and I have looked out for work day by day since the 21st Dec. last, but cannot get a job. I hope, in a few weeks, the Quarries will be carried on again; but, in the mean time, I have nothing to obtain bread with for myself and my wife and family; and, because I am out of work, I have no credit therefore I am compelled to ask for parochial relief; which if not speedily sent me, I shall be under the necessity of getting my family removed, which circumstances will be very unpleasant to the Township in which I reside. You know I am not allowed to live in Kirkby Irelith, on account of the other removal, which no doubt you'll remember; – I do. – Therefore you will have the goodness to send me something, in order that I may provide bread for my family till I can get employment.

Letter from Joseph Raven, Broughton-Beck near Ulverston, to Longsleddle, 1 January 1834 (Cumbria Archive Service, WPR85/39/7/1)

The opposite end of the scale is illustrated by Joseph Raven, writing from near Ulverston on New Year's Day 1834. The first page of the letter is reproduced here and we can immediately see a different orthographic ability – the opening lines read: 'I am extremely sorry to inform you, that, in consequence of the Slaterivers at Kirkby Irelith Quarries, who have entered into the "Union", I cannot get employment' – the confidence of his hand and the range of Raven's language, compared to Salkeld.

Researcher's Contribution

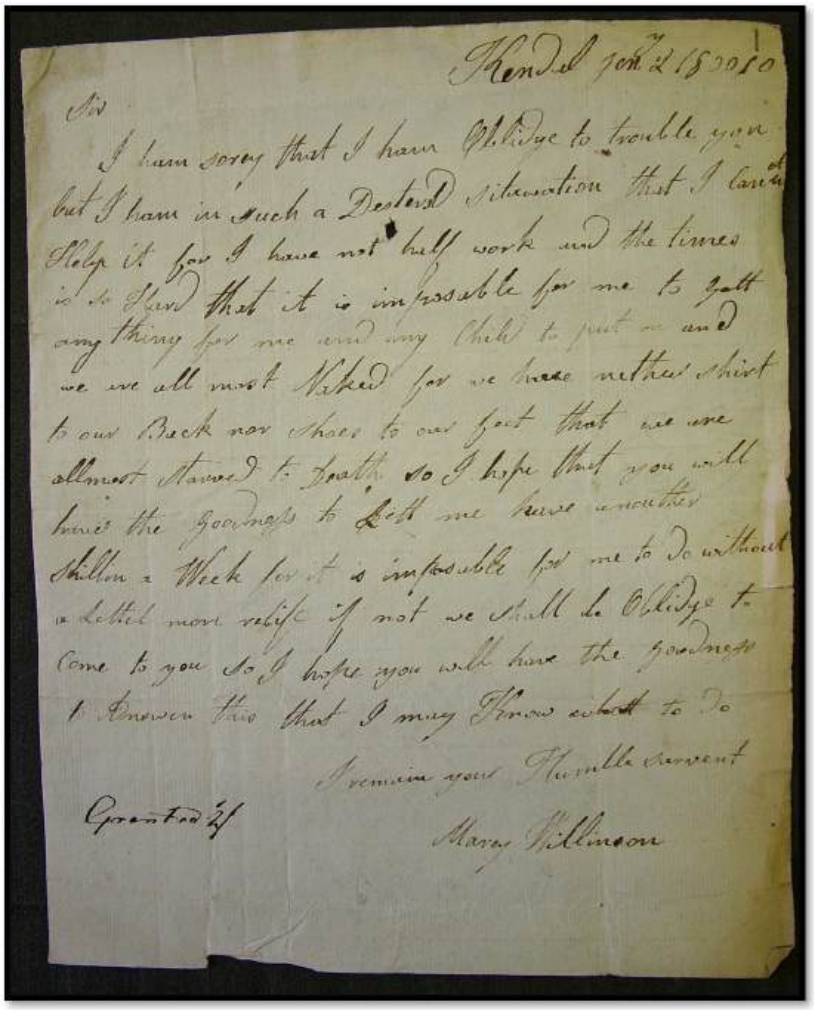


Three letters from John 'Loftus', Preston, to Kirkby Lonsdale, 27 February 1815, 9 December 1816, 25 May 1836 (Cumbria Archive Service, WPR19/7/6/8/1, 19/7/6/9/20, 19/7/6/29/29)

Whether Joseph actually wrote this letter or had someone do it for him cannot be proved conclusively. In other cases, we can certainly point to very complex authorial voices. Here are three letters from John Loftus (a.k.a., Loftas or Loftoss), and it is abundantly clear that, although they were written in the first person, these letters were actually the work of three different writers. In this case, it is likely that none of them was written by Loftus himself, because if he had any literacy skills at all it is unlikely he would have allowed his name to be spelt differently in each of them. It is also highly improbable that there was a deliberate intention to deceive the overseer into believing that any or all of these letters was actually written by Loftus: it would have been immediately obvious to any reader that each was in a different hand.

Series of letters such as these suggest that a kind of communal voice was at play in much pauper correspondence, and that this was an accepted part of both the letter-writing and negotiating process on both sides.

Letter from Mary Wilkinson, Kendal, to Kirkby Lonsdale, 2 January 1810 (Cumbria Archive Service, WPR19/7/6/3/1)



Kendal Jan.y 2 1810

Sir

I ham sorey that I ham Oblidge to trouble you but I ham in such a Destersd situation that I cant help it for I have not half work and the times is so hard that it is impssable for me to gett any thing for me and my Child to put on and we are all most Naked for we have nether shirt to our Back nor shoes to our feet that we are allmost Starved to death so I hope that you will have the Goodness to Lett me have anouther Shillin a Week for it is impssable for me to do without a Lettel more reliefe if not we shall be Oblidge to come to you so I hope you will have the goodness to Answer this that I may Know wheat to Do

I remain your Humble Servent

Granted 2/

Mary Wilkinson

This brings us back to the core purpose of these letters. They were there to secure welfare and as such they offer us a remarkable insight into the rhetorical, strategic and referential strategies of poor people, and are a unique window onto how they understood power and lived their lives. We can see some of this potential in the letter of Mary Wilkinson, living in Kendal and writing back to her settlement parish of Kirkby Lonsdale in 1810.

Wilkinson wrote that 'I ham sorry that I ham oblidge to trouble you but I ham in such a destersd [*distressed*] situation that I cannot help it'. She then explained she had 'not half work' – in other words, that she was underemployed – and that 'the times is so hard that it is impossible for me to gett any thing for me and my child'. Having explained the 'facts' of her situation, Wilkinson added: 'we are almost naked for we have nether shirt to our back nor shoes to our feet … [*and*] we are almost starved to death'.

How are we to read Wilkinson's letter? It is unlikely that she and her child were literally starving and naked. The first would have been illegal and the second would have offended public decency. We (like the overseer who received it) must 'de-code' Mary Wilkinson's letter.

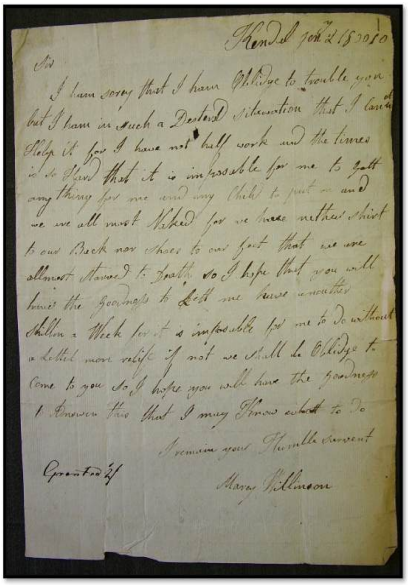
Researcher's Contribution

Clearly, she used the motifs of starvation and nakedness strategically to emphasise the precariousness of her situation. They were, if you like, 'trigger words', designed to gain the attention of officials and to persuade them of the urgency of her case. By using such emotive (and perhaps, to a modern eye, extreme) language, Wilkinson also hoped to invoke the overseer's and ratepayers' sense of civic duty. Her rhetorical strategy was therefore carefully calculated to elicit the quickest and best response from her point of view. This is further emphasised by a veiled threat that, if the overseer did not relieve her in a timely fashion, she would be 'oblidge to come to you'; in other words, that she and her child would be forced to return to Kirkby Lonsdale where, in all likelihood, she would be an even greater financial burden requiring not only full maintenance but also accommodation at the parish's expense.

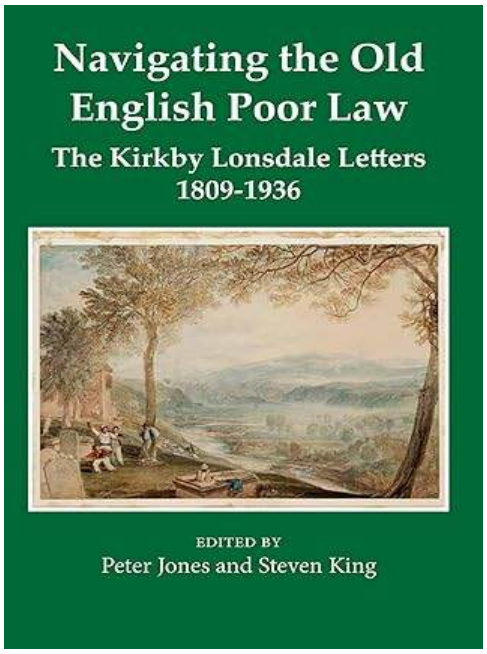
Like almost all pauper letter writers, Mary Wilkinson's understanding of the rhetorics of relief appeals is therefore highly sophisticated. She navigates the tension between emphasising her needfulness, holding the parish to account, and maintaining due humility with great skill, despite having only imperfect literacy skills. She stresses that she is 'sorry that I ham oblige to trouble' the overseer and vestry, and that she (presumably a single woman with a dependent child) is at the mercy of their kindness: 'I hope you will have the goodness to answer this that I may know what to do'. The letter ends with supplication - 'I remain your humble servant' - further demonstrating Wilkinson's understanding of broader letter-writing protocols.

These strategies were part of what we might describe as a pauper's rhetorical armoury, the phrases which were designed to create effective 'word pictures' and to gain the most favourable result in negotiations for relief under what was a discretionary welfare system. But this is far from claiming that they are works of fiction. Overseers had and used a number of ways to test the 'truth' of such accounts. If we can assume they are broadly 'truthful' (that is, within accepted limits of exaggeration or hyperbole) then such material tells us remarkable stories about literacy, social history, migration, family life, and the everyday life of poor people.

Letter from Mary Wilkinson, Kendal, to Kirkby Lonsdale, 2 January 1810 (Cumbria



We have already transcribed and published some of these pauper letters – P. Jones and S. King, *Navigating the Old English Poor Law: The Kirkby Lonsdale Letters, 1809-1836* (Oxford, 2020) – and are now working with Cumbria Archives on a new project called 'Writing Under Stress'.



In this we will move from what is written on the page to questions about the materiality of the letters: Where did people get paper/ink? What sort of paper? Can we tell things from watermarks? Was paper recycled and re-used? Can indentation and amendment tell us something about the mindset of the writer?

Wed 16 Sept

Thu 17 Sept

Questions like these will be explored in two workshops at Stricklandgate House, Kendal on 16 and 17 September.

The links are below or scan the QR codes on the left to book a place. Please do join us if you can:

16 September: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/writing-under-stress-the-meaning-and-materiality-of-pauper-letters-tickets-1984390839419

17 September: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/writing-under-stress-the-meaning-and-materiality-of-pauper-letters-tickets-1984391906611

Conservation and Digitisation

Erika Freyr, Senior Conservator

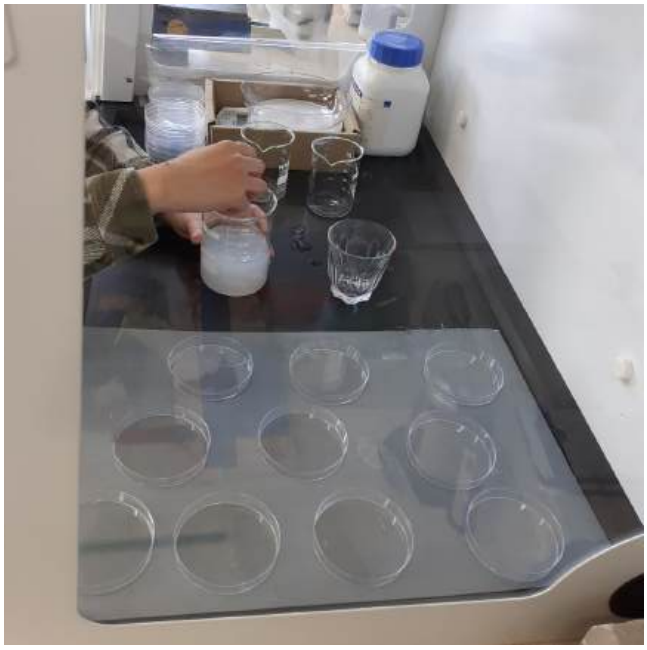
Conservation

Conservation and Digitisation have had a very busy few months this year so far and the rest of the year looks no different. Along with preparing Kendal Archives for the move to their new locations, there are all the usual tasks to undertake, including cleaning and repairing of existing collections and new deposits.

This year, we hosted two DREAM Placement students, a scheme offering one week's work experience to school leavers, arranged by the Centre for Leadership Performance with host companies from across Cumbria. Hopefully inspiring a new generation of conservators, Erika and Fay took part in the selection day, choosing two students, Jorja and Charlie, to have their placement with us in spring 2026.

We threw them in the deep end and gave them a taste of as much of the different work we do in conservation and digitisation as we could fit in. They repaired books, reattaching spines and repairing torn pages. They removed prints from their frames, cleaned and washed them, and reframed them again. They learnt about wax seals and their packaging, watched the digitisation of the wills, and tried out some bookbinding skills, making a notebook from scratch to take home. Jorja gamely performed some of this for the first time while being filmed for the organisation's promotional material, and Erika had to do a piece to camera that she's still trying to recover from. Hopefully this hasn't put them off a career in conservation or digitisation, but judging by their enthusiasm, we don't think so.

In May, Erika, Fay, and Melina attended the "Paper conservators in Scotland news and ideas exchange, 2026" in Edinburgh. Erika presented Claire's research and experiments in nanocellulose tracing paper repairs. As a result, eleven attendees asked to visit us here in the studio to learn more about Claire's nanocellulose research, used while working on National Manuscripts Conservation Trust funded Mawson project. For this, we prepared the studio and some presentations while



Melina helped Claire and Fay get ready by making up 1%, 2.5%, and 5% Methylcellulose and Gellan gum. It's a good excuse for us to brush up on our knowledge of it, so huge thanks to Claire for making so many useful resources for us to use!

Our volunteers continue to steadily work through the repackaging of the Diocese of Carlisle probate records, dating from 1563 to 1857, to prepare them for digitisation. This started before Fay arrived in October 2018 and we have estimated will take another 8 years, so there is plenty to keep them busy. They have just finished 1670, with a grand total of approximately 6,500 wills repackaged in 2025 alone. We have a regular cohort of 8 people who attend our fortnightly sessions, some of whom do it for fun, others to gather work experience for further study. Melina has been learning how to manage this project, gaining valuable experience in the use of Calm, and the cleaning, packing, and digitisation of the wills.

Fay Humphreys,

Conservator

Claire Dean,

Conservator

Melina Shin,

Collections Assistant

Digitisation

In Digitisation, we now have the inclusion of the Goldenthread Object Level Targets to our equipment. This marks a significant improvement to our workflow quality control as it will replace our standard ColorChecker passports, captured beside every image we take. Whereas previously we used these checkers to adjust and monitor white balance levels and colour accuracy ourselves (a significant outlay of time), the new targets adhere to an international archival imaging standard and allows for a far more in-depth review of all kinds of variables you will thank us for not detailing here.

Digitisation Handbook - Page 8 of 22

Daily Start-up (Goldenthread)

Set the target as central as possible to ensure maximum light uniformity

1. Capture object + target, then select the White Balance tool before clicking on Patch No 13
2. Hover mouse over patch 13. The RGB should read 205, 207, 204 with an allowance of 3 points*
3. Hover mouse over patch 11. The RGB should read 233, 234, 232 with an allowance of 3 points
4. Hover mouse over patch 14. The RGB should read 177, 179, 178 with an allowance of 4 points
5. Export capture at 16bit, upload to NimbusQA to check adherence to Metamorfoze or FADGI**

*For example, 207, 205, 206 is tolerated, but 203, 205, 207 is not. All three numbers must be within 3 of each other.

**Create a new export recipe specifically for this file, as we only store 8bit TIFFs in our archives.

Because our target has a slight green bias, our Green channel should usually read 1 or 2 points higher than Red and Blue.

In short (ish), we can now upload any image taken with the targets to our own software or securely hosted site by the Imaging Science Association, and receive a straightforward pass/fail report on whether the digital file meets required quality specifications to be a confirmed accurate digital representation of the physical original. This means that in 50 years' time if there is any doubt about the colour of a specific map or painting, the target data of our images can be used to mathematically reconstruct the exact appearance of the original, regardless of what screen or printer they are using.

During May, digitisation prioritised a post-spring clean. Alongside digitising various Mawson plans, preparing the Ahmadiyya Mosque facsimiles, and reorganising Digitisation Unit 2, we focused on clearing out a backlog of unfinished projects from the past several years. This involved auditing Capture One sessions in need of re-cropping and re-processing, as well as resolving duplicate, lost, orphaned, and lonely files. Excluding leftover legacy work, we successfully cleared nearly 700 GB of data and uploaded 16 completed projects to Archives and Access this month. Only a small fraction of outstanding work now remains.

George Platt,

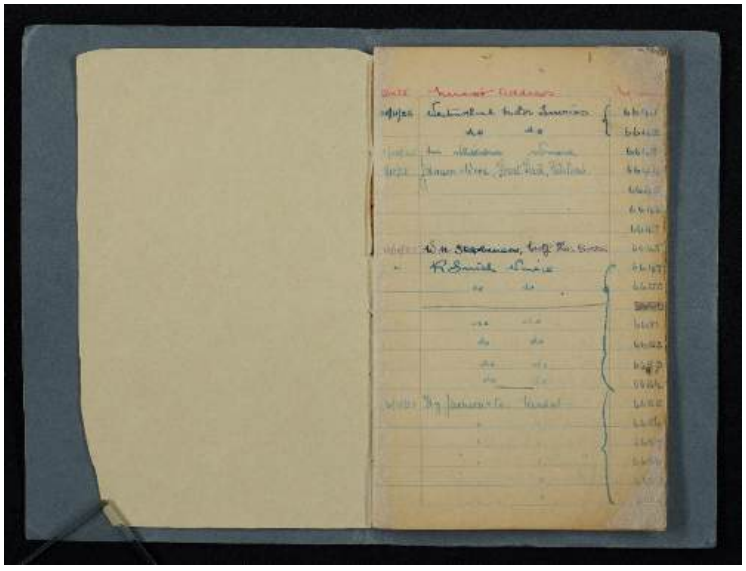
Digitisation Technician

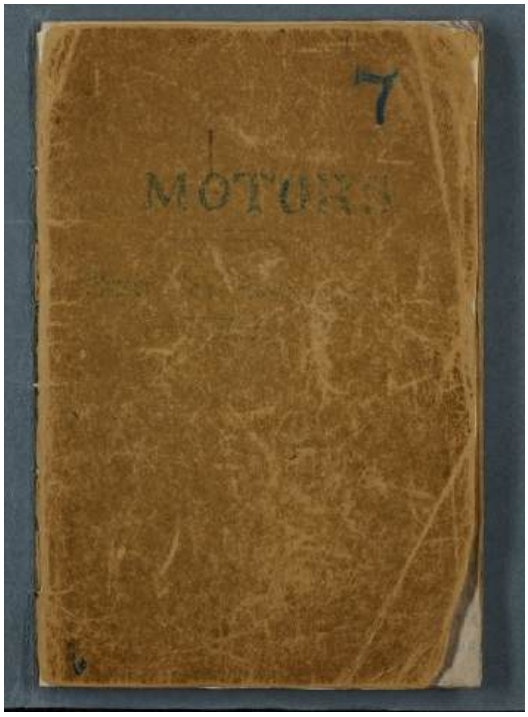
I've recently spent some time digitising Westmorland Council's records of motor vehicle registrations from the 1920s onwards. "Records" are a misnomer here, because they consist of small, handwritten notebooks such as you would use to write down reminders for yourself. EC was the numberplate code assigned to Westmorland under the Motor Car Act of 1903, and our records start with EC 6641. The records say almost nothing about the car or its history, but are still popular with classic car enthusiasts.

The digitised images are now safely stored on Cumberland Council's servers, and our archivist Anthony is in the process of transferring them to Preservica, our digital strongroom, where one day the public will be able to access them.

Helen Leech,

Digitisation Technician





WC/MT/7/1 Vehicle Registration EC6641-7820

Digitisation meetup at Cumbria Archives

In January, we held our second meetup for anybody involved in heritage digitisation, and invited:

- All the museums in Cumbria
- All of our sister archive services in neighbouring authorities
- The colleges and universities locally with an archive function.

The format was an afternoon of twelve five-minute presentations, and worked well: speakers don't have time to get nervous, and the audience doesn't have time to get bored. You can't delve into any subject in depth, but there's the chance to ask questions, and tea breaks (with cake!) to really get to the heart of an issue.

The presentations were very diverse. Most of the museums in Cumbria are too small to afford to digitise their collections, but still there is plenty of work going on: Nick Hazlewood of the Cumbria Museum of Military Life has an impressive bank of images, Derek Denman who volunteers at Cockermouth Castle spoke about their digitisation project, and Hollie Barker from the Hawkshead

Grammar School Museum and Library showed how they are using the free resource Bloomberg Connects to open their museum to a digital audience.

The archive services run by local authorities have a patchwork of digitisation at various levels of sophistication, depending on whether the authority considers digitisation a priority. One authority attending was just starting out, whereas Cumbria has been digitising materials since 2011. Carolyn Ball from The Story in Durham spoke about their truly impressive register of baptisms, marriages, banns of marriage and burials, through which members of the public can access digitised versions of the original records. Cumbria staff spoke about the "Goldenthread" colour chart which allows extremely precise management of the capture of colours, record management processes, and a presentation about audio digitisation using BBC playback and editing machines donated to the authority through the British Library's project, "Unlocking our Sound History".

The universities tend to be where the technology and innovation lie. Fran Robinson from the University of Lancashire showed off their Treventus scanning robot, and Jamie Robinson from John Rylands University (with 115 years of imaging history) gave a presentation including multispectral and 3D imaging.

The event was an opportunity for us to get together and learn from each other, and hopefully attendees went home with an understanding of what kind of expertise is available locally, and maybe a resolution to try something new.

Helen Leech,

Digitisation Technician

Carlisle Archives Update

Kelda Roe and Michael Stephens, Archivists

Recent Accessions

We were delighted to take in a deposit of records for Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Penrith. We already held a few key records including the letters patent of Elizabeth I, July 1564, and the Registre book of the Free School of Penrith, 1699-1909. Last year I was contacted by the school librarian, and arrangements were made for the transfer of the material to Carlisle Archives. The range of material is impressive, and the collection is arranged over the following categories: constitution and governance: 1564-1999, school estates: 1867, school buildings and fabric: 1864-2008, finance: 1707-2006, school staff: 1905-1973, school pupils: 1710-2004, and printed and published materials: 1867-2019. The listing is not yet complete but will be available to view on CASCAT in due course.

Another significant deposit was the Christopher Terry Archive which includes the records he collected that relate to the history of Brougham Hall (some original, some copies) as well as records created by the Terry family in the course of renovating and managing the Hall. The catalogue for the entire collection can be viewed on CASCAT by entering the reference DBRO* in the reference number field.

Family historians will be keen to learn of new deposits which will assist them in their research. Cumbria Family History Society kindly deposited several parish register transcripts and monumental inscriptions: Askham registers 1813-1837; Kendal Unitarian Chapel register 1687-1855; Bowness on Solway MIs and index; Lanercost MIs and index; Penrith baptisms 1813-1837; Silloth St Paul parish registers 1849-1996.

This year we have acquired 2 deposits of hospital records. Blencathra Isolation Hospital (ref. THOS 10). The first deposit includes a minute book which precedes the 2 existing minute books which we already hold and covers the early years of this institution from 1903. Dovenby Hall Colony, Cockermouth (ref. THOS 17). We have recently acquired about 2 dozen minute books of the Management Committee from the early 1950s to early 1970s

On a sporting note we received the first ever deposit of records from West End Bowling Club, Carlisle, 1889-2016. The collection includes minute books (12) which cover the years 1889-2013; dated record of membership book, 1918-2006; building fund account book and photograph album of building works, 1997-2002; Ladies Section minute books (3), 1976-1997; club diaries (2), 2013-2014, loose photographs including a match against Worcester Touring Bowling Club, July 1983 (ref. DSO 578).

For fans of railway architecture we have received 2 albums containing photographs that record the appearance of bridges, stations, and other buildings along the lines of the Maryport and Carlisle Railway and the Cockermouth and Workington Railway, 1985-2019 (ref. DX 2714).

We always welcome illustrative material including photograph albums and scrapbooks. We have taken in a photograph album and scrapbook of press cuttings

DSO 519/4/1 Carlisle Archives

(ref. DX 2703) relating to Alderman Mr Thomas Souness, Mayor of Carlisle. This item covers his time in office over the years 1960-1961. We also managed to secure a digital copy of the sale catalogue of the contents of Corby Castle (ref. DX 2705). Tennants Auctioneers were responsible for managing the sale of house contents in 2025. A black and white photograph album of Margaret Sewell School has been donated. It is entitled 'School Memories' from September 1952, (ref. DS 89).

On an agricultural theme we have received quite a few deposits of material. Black and white photographs of harvesting activity at Mr Thomas Bell's Middle Farm, near Brampton, 1939. Some of the photographs show a picking machine being used to gather and bale the hay (ref. DX 2717); Raughton Head Young Farmers Club: accounts book, scrapbooks, minute books and annual financial statements, 1943-2019 (ref. DSO 519); Dalston Agricultural Society: account books, minute books, judge's notebook and photographs, 1920-2025 (ref. DSO 577); and a minute book of the Alston Cattle Show, 1885-1893 (ref. DSO 583).

Royal enthusiasts might be interested to learn that we received a deposit of customer order files from S Redmayne Limited, Tailors, Victoria Place, Carlisle. These files include an order for 2 hunting coats for HRH Prince Philip and his former son-in-law Captain Mark Phillips (ref. DB 86).

Michael Stephens,

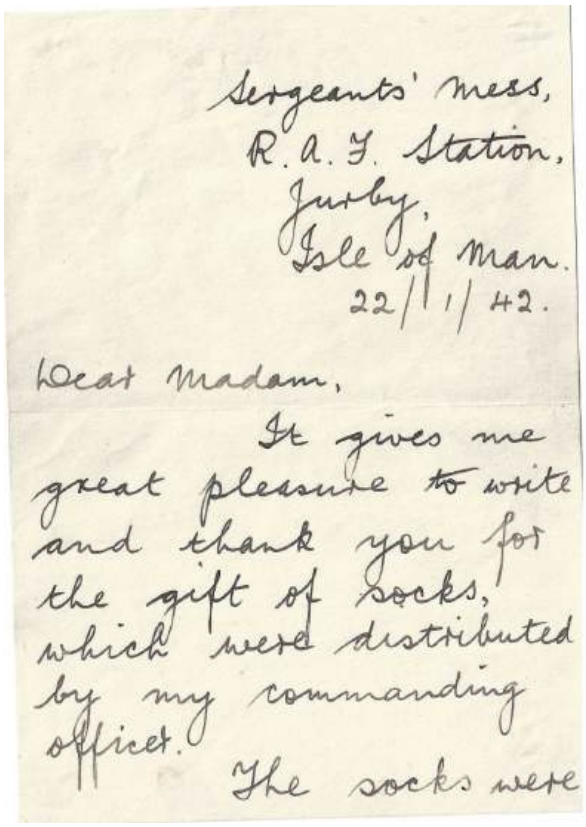
Archivist

Cataloguing

Recently, a list was discovered in the paper catalogues that hadn't been listed on CASCAT; this series is from the Clerk's Department of the Carlisle City Council, reference Ca/C/7 This collection contains 115 boxes of material relating to a wide variety of subjects in Carlisle from allotments to the Royal Show of 1902 to Castle Street Improvement, 1900-1938. This cataloguing has already proved beneficial to one customer who was researching the General Strike, 1926 in Cumberland. They were pleased to discover box 55 as "there's not much written/recorded about the effects of the general strike in Cumberland." He was then delivering a talk about the General Strike effects in the north at the People's History Museum in Manchester, as part of the centenary of their exhibition titled On the Line.

Sarah Wood,

Archives Assistant



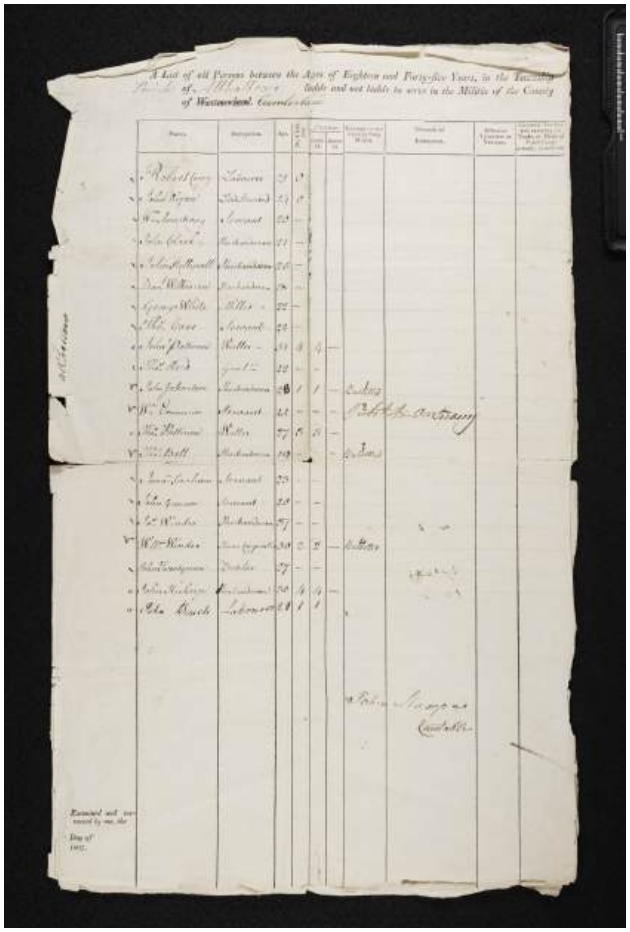
Sergeants' mess,
R.A.F. Station,
Jurby,
Isle of Man.
22/1/42.

Dear Madam,

It gives me great pleasure to write and thank you for the gift of socks, which were distributed by my commanding officer.

The socks were

DX 2664 Thank you letters



Q/MIL/1/11807/1/1 Allhallows militia ballot papers

Outreach

Our school workshops have continued with a return visit to Stoneraise School to learn about World War Two in Cumbria. In addition to finding out about evacuees and the Barrow Blitz, a recent deposit of two thank you letters have become part of the workshop. Written by RAF servicemen who received gifts of knitted socks and gloves from school children at Watermillock, we showed them to the students to demonstrate that everyone on the Home Front was doing their bit to help the war effort.

We also visited Brampton Primary School with postgraduate student Eilidh to deliver a session on the history of the Basque Refugee children, using copy documents from the Roberts family of Boothby collection DROB. The children came to Brampton in 1937, living in a hostel in the town. The students hadn't heard the story before but were intrigued to discover that the site of the hostel was next to the current school and they walk past the blue plaque commemorating it every day without realising. It was a very enjoyable session, although next time, we'll probably avoid going in on World Book Day when the class is in fancy dress!

Volunteer Projects

Volunteers at Carlisle work on a variety of different projects, but one of these is the indexing of the Militia Records. Cumberland Militia ballot lists from 1797 to 1831, which recorded able-bodied men aged 18–45 eligible for service. These lists, rich in personal data such as age, occupation, and exemptions, offer rare insights into social and economic conditions across three of Cumberland's five wards. Despite their historical value, only 50% of the collection has been indexed, and volunteers are working hard to index the remaining documents. This project has been ongoing for the last 5 years and will probably take another three to four years to complete. Completed index lists are available in the searchroom at Carlisle.

Kendal Archives Update

Anthony Hughes and Joanne Robson, Archivists

Recent Accessions

Kendal Archives has received many new accessions in 2026, and here are some of the highlights:

WDSO 327 Levens Park archaeology papers including David Sturdy's plans of Levens Park; papers and correspondence, including letters from Don Benson; newspaper cuttings; papers relating to the planning enquiry including proof of evidence of David Sturdy, and road engineers; copy catalogue of Don Benson's Levens Park archives, 1960s-2025

WDSO 459 Kendal and South Westmorland Beekeepers Association, including minutes 1945-2019; correspondence; photographs; membership lists; etc.

WDX 2122 Receipt for wintering bullocks received of Sir Philip Musgrave by Christopher Dobson £58 6s for fourteen wintering bullocks purchased 1 October 1764 at Brough Hill Fair for Eden Grounds by John Rogerson

WDSO 460 Westmorland Youth Orchestra including newsletters, 2009-2016; programmes 2009-2016; annual report, 2008/2009

WDX 2123 Jameson family of Town Head Farm, Long Marton including account books 1785-1983, land surveying exercise books 1823-1864, surgery notebook early 20th century, photograph album of Jameson family photographs 1902-1904, newspaper cutting books 1904-1970, plans, family estate administration papers.

WDSO 152 Crook Women's Institute including minutes of monthly meetings 2017-2018; AGM minutes 2016-2019

WDSO 461 Crook Memorial Hall committee minutes and cash book, 1919-1999

WDSO 371 K Fellfarers minutes and correspondence 2020-2021; High House visitors book 2019-2025

WDX 2124 'Vote For Bagot' flyer encouraging voters to vote for Conservative candidate Josceline Bagot over Liberal candidate William Somervell as MP for Kendal in the December 1910 General Election.

WDX 2125 John Garnett photographs, glass plates negatives taken by John Garnett, 19th-20th century

WDX 2126 Extracts from 'A Boke Off Recorde' belonging to the Corporation of Kirkbie Kendal [copy] - manuscript copy of extracts with coloured title page

WDX 2127 Coniston Copper Mines structural record book of standing buildings, containing descriptions, measurements, and plans, 1987

WDSO 42 Westmorland/ Cumbria South Girl Guides including registration forms 1918-2008; index cards (arranged by name and position).

WDX 2128 Crook District History Trail booklet, trail number 1, Ancient and Sacred Land, undated [circa 1970s]

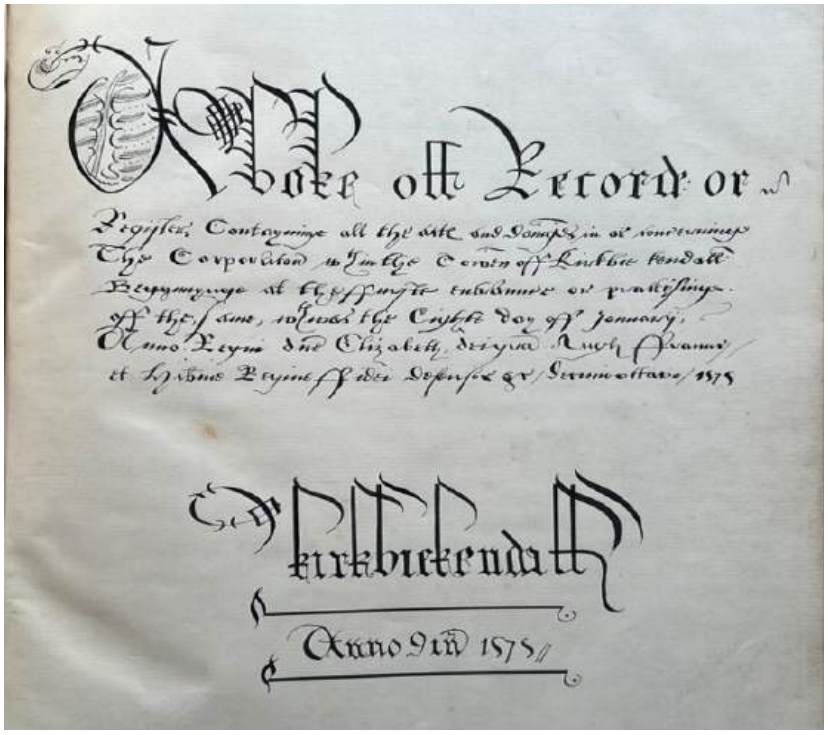
‘A Boke off Recorde’

We were pleased to receive a donation of a volume of transcripts of extracts from Kendal Corporation’s Book of Record [ref WDX 2126/1]. The original volume, which is also held by us in the Kendal Corporation collection [ref WSMBK/1/1/1], dates from 1575. Our searchroom library also contains a published transcription by the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society.

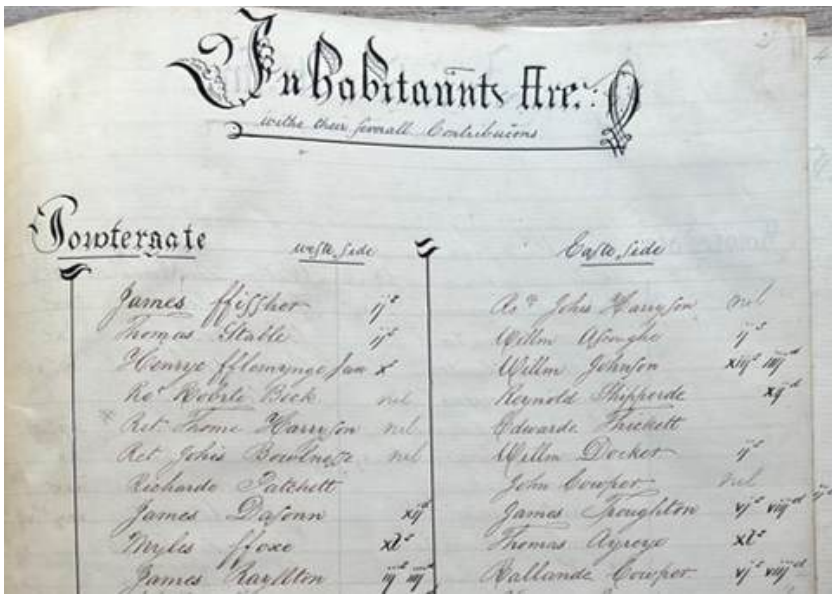
The volume of transcribed extracts was written by Robert Sumner Moore in 1855, and he also created a fine illustrated title page for the volume. Robert Sumner Moore appears on another record from 1855 in the Kendal Corporation collection as the illustrator of a compass in the form of a gentian, a decorative title with illuminated initials and coats of arms, on a plan of property in the township of Kendal belonging to the Corporation.

The Book of Record’s title page tells us that it is a ‘Recorde or Register contayninge all the Acts and Doinges in or Concerning w’in the Towen of Kirkbie Kendall Begynnynge at the ffirst entrance or practysinge off the same wch was the eighte day off Januarii Anno Regni Dne Elizabethe…decimo octavo…’.

Title page showing Mr Moore’s fine transcription, 1855



The volume contains a street directory, lists of municipal dignitaries and officials, lists of freemen grouped under their respective trades (such as shearmen, glovers, butchers, innkeepers, pewterers), and orders and regulations (including those relating to cloth, the taking of apprentices, division of the wards, and unlawful games).



List of inhabitants in ‘Sowtergate’ [now known as Highgate], Kendal

Illustrated title page by Robert Sumner Moore, 1855

The donor of the volume stated that the book was in the possession of Norman Camm who was a housing officer for the borough of Kendal in the mid-twentieth century. Camm is a well-known name in Kendal, and the family lived in Yard 89 Stricklandgate, known as Camms Yard. We hold a photograph of Norman Camm in the Margaret and Percy Duff photographic collection which shows Alfred Wainwright in his role as Borough Treasurer talking to Mr Camm, who was retiring at the age of 65 [ref WDMPD/3/11/244].

According to Richard Ferguson in his introduction to the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society transcript of 1892, Kendal Corporation possessed a transcript of the original Book of Record which was found to be a paraphrase and translation rather than a full transcript; and a separate partial transcript of the Book was made for Cornelius Nicholson, who was certainly active and interested in Kendal's history in the 1850s. It is difficult to say whether the volume donated to us is either book, or a different transcript entirely. Whatever the origins of the volume we have been given, it is a fine addition to our collections.

Anthony Hughes,

Archivist

How to avoid tracing paper confetti

Dr Claire Dean, Conservator

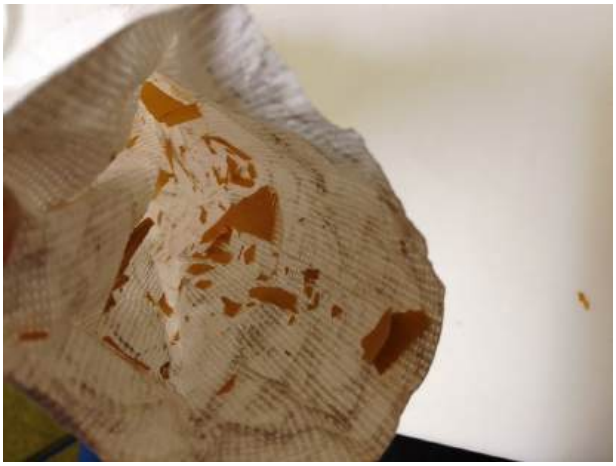
As conservators, it's our job to ensure that the records in the archive's care reach the researchers who want to access them in as well-preserved condition as possible. Some materials, however, seem intent on their own destruction, and to be fair, some of these were never intended to last long-term. When tracing paper was utilised by architects and engineers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is unlikely anyone was thinking about the future use of these plans in an archive. The main reasons for the fragility of tracing paper lie in how it was made:

Example of a damaged tracing paper plan

What is tracing paper?

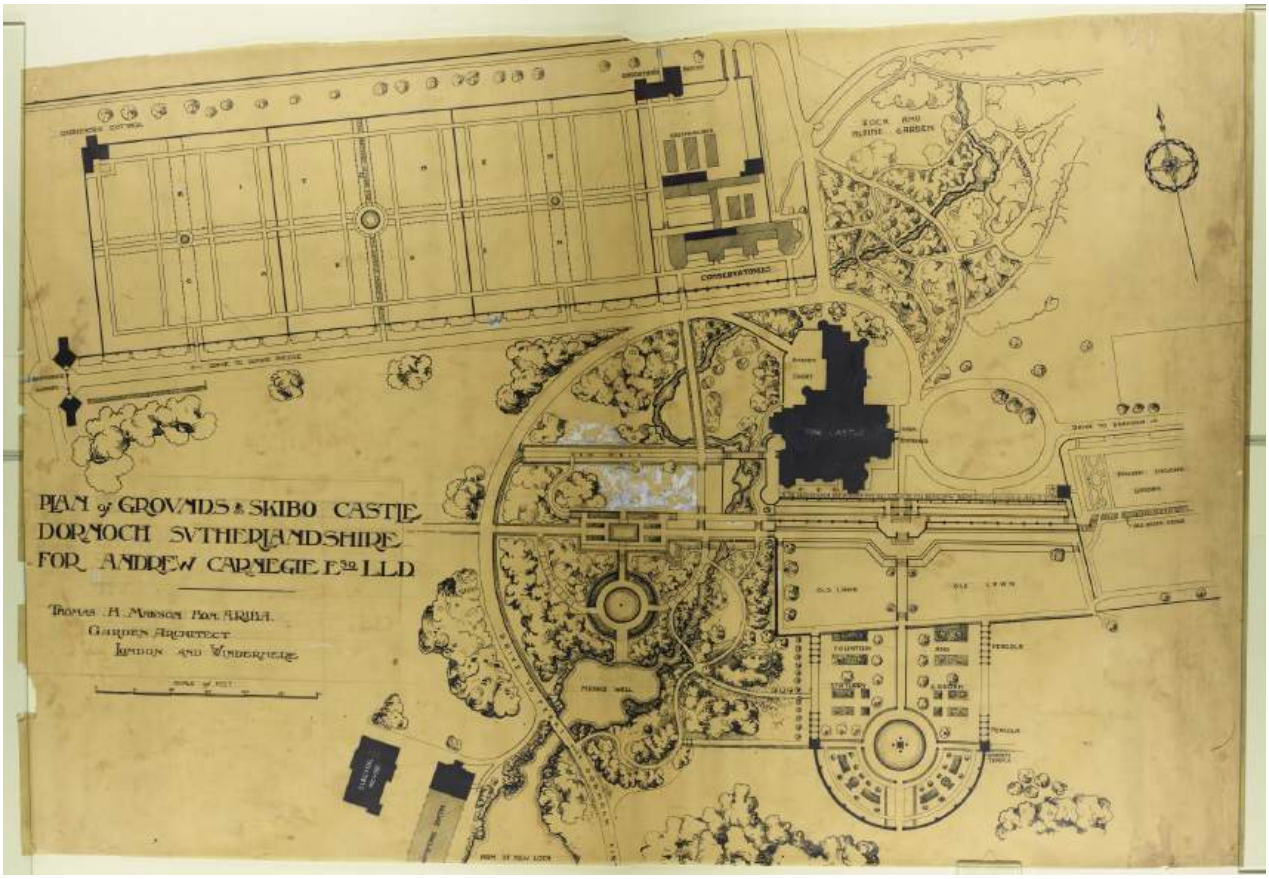
Tracing paper is made of cellulose fibres just like standard paper. The cellulose can come from cotton rags, or as is more likely from the mid-19th century onwards, wood pulp. Surprisingly, the thing that makes tracing paper translucent is that it is paper that contains no air. In standard paper, there are air gaps between the cellulose fibres, which means that light can be refracted. This gives the sheet the appearance of being solid and white. In tracing paper, however, these gaps are filled.

In earlier tracing papers, oils and resins were used to fill the gaps in pre-made sheets. Later, new methods were developed that included bursting the cellulose fibres with acids so they would swell to fill the space or beating them and calendaring the sheets with a hot press so that no air gaps were left. This means tracing paper fibres are incredibly short and liable to breakage.



Fragments of tracing paper inside packaging

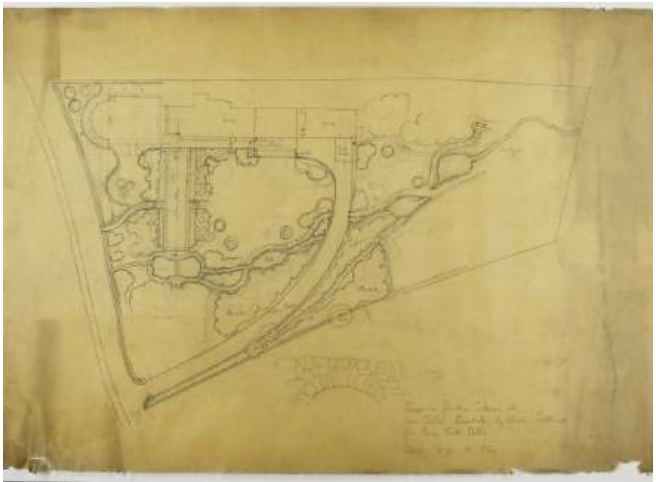
These sheets were also formed on wide rollers and given any access to moisture, the sheet will rapidly expand towards its original width. As it dries it will contract just as dramatically, leading to what conservators call planar distortion, and even more fragility.



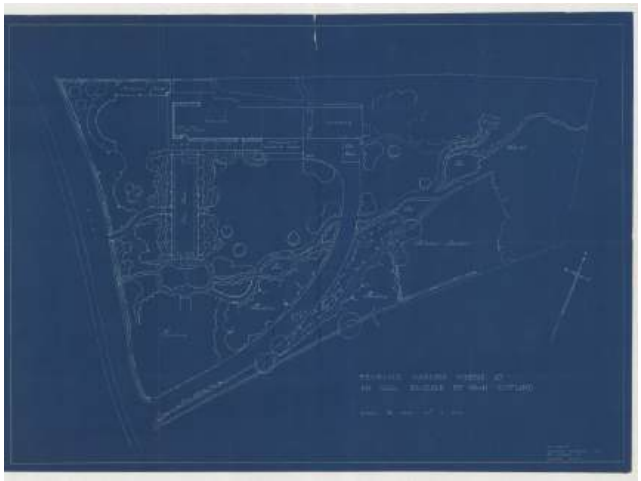
WDB 86/1/23b original tracing paper drawing

Where is tracing paper found in the archives?

The majority of tracing paper in our collections can be found in architectural and building control collections, but it can also pop up in all kinds of records. It may have been used to trace an original drawing, or to reproduce elements of a plan, or it might contain an original drawing that could then be used in a photo-reproduction process like blueprinting to create copies.



WDB 86/4/195/3 original tracing paper drawing



WDB 86/4/195/2 later copy made as a blueprint

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, tracing paper manufacture was a thriving industry in the North West of England. Paper mills grew up alongside the cotton industry that provided its waste material for paper before wood pulp replaced rags. On a visit to the Museum of Science and Industry Museum's Research Centre Archive to research manufacturers, I found samples that show the wide range of tracing papers that were available to drafters. These came in different weights and included blue or white shades, glazed, matt or unprepared sheets. What all these tracing papers have in common, though, is their increased fragility over time.

How can we best preserve our tracing paper records?

To help protect and preserve our tracing paper, we:

- Store records in suitable environmental conditions to protect them from moisture, light and pests. We store rolls horizontally in sleeves that protect them. In the offices where the rolls have spent their working lives, they have often been stored vertically and so arrive in the archive with crumpled ends.
- Offer supported handling in the searchroom – if you request a record that contains tracing paper and you need guidance or support, please ask. Always let the searchroom staff know if you encounter a record that seems particularly fragile.
- Carry out sensitive repairs to stabilise tracings. We use techniques that retain the translucency of the paper as far as possible, so important detail is not lost.
- Digitise records to reduce handling. Both the original records and the digital files are then carefully stored, monitored and preserved.

Tracing paper plans can appear to be ephemeral in nature, and they may depict buildings or landmarks that were never built, or that no longer exist, but the archives staff across all our teams are working hard to make sure they can still be accessed far into the future.

Mining Research: My experience in Whitehaven Archives

Mike McCrickard

My first experience using the Cumberland archive service began in the mid 1990s, for my research into mining accidents and disasters in my local area of Whitehaven.

I visited the archives when it was based in Carlisle Castle, but this eventually proved prohibitive due to the 80-mile round-trip and the reduced time to conduct my research.

Thankfully the Archive Service opened in Whitehaven, and this service has continued to provide me with the necessary information ever since whilst proving to be an invaluable asset to myself and the town of Whitehaven. So far, I have recorded over 4,000 lost souls due to mining fatalities and over 10,000 individual names due to mining accidents or being a witness to an accident.

Due to the Whitehaven archives, I have managed to write a local book called 'The Cumberland Miner' on the work carried out by the Iron Ore Miners Union to protect their members in times of need and I have also assisted other individuals who have or are currently writing books on the mining history of Whitehaven and surrounding districts.

Through the local Pit Crack Group who receive requests for family history information on mining ancestors or individuals contacting myself and the invaluable service provided by the Whitehaven archives, I have been able to provide information to individuals all over the world to assist with family history research.

I have seen over the years, the staff at the Whitehaven archives, give assistance to many individuals, researching many different subjects, and they never cease to amaze me with their incredible knowledge which they share with the researcher, always guiding them in the right direction, no job is too big or too small and each person is treated with respect.

I cannot emphasise enough, my thanks to both past and present Whitehaven Archive staff, all super helpful and appreciated individuals.

Long may the Whitehaven Archives prosper.

Whitehaven Archives Update

Diane Hodgson and Darren Ferrier, Archivists

Recent Accessions

Allerdale Borough Council oral history film footage "Remembering Maryport High Street", 2022 and digitised 1930s cinefilm footage of Maryport, [1930s], (SDA)

Cleator Moor Local Board, plan of public sewers marked on an OS map, circa 1885-1891 (SRDEB)

Photograph album of Marjorie Roberts, featuring Whitehaven, St Bees and St Helen's School in Cockermouth, circa 1864-circa 1962, (PH/1692)

Photographs of the unveiling of the WWII plaques on Egremont War Memorial, undated [1952], (PH/1693)

Marchon employee's papers including newsletters, invitations and photographs, 1938-1969 (YDB 59)

Western Fells Methodist Circuit meeting minutes, 1993-2009; Distington Methodist Church Council meeting minutes, 2019-2024 (YDFCM 1, YDFCM 8)

Greenlane Archaeology reports for various sites in West Cumbria including St Bees Priory, Eskdale Mill, Moresby Hall and Ravenglass Roman Bath House, 2010-2025, (YDX 439)

Postcards of West Cumbrian towns, early 20th century, (PH/1694)

Arlecdon Local History Group: photographs, correspondence and ephemera, late 19th century-2017, (YDSO 209)

Lorton and Derwent Fells Local History Society, images of the Leconfield archives, 2025 (YDSO 206)

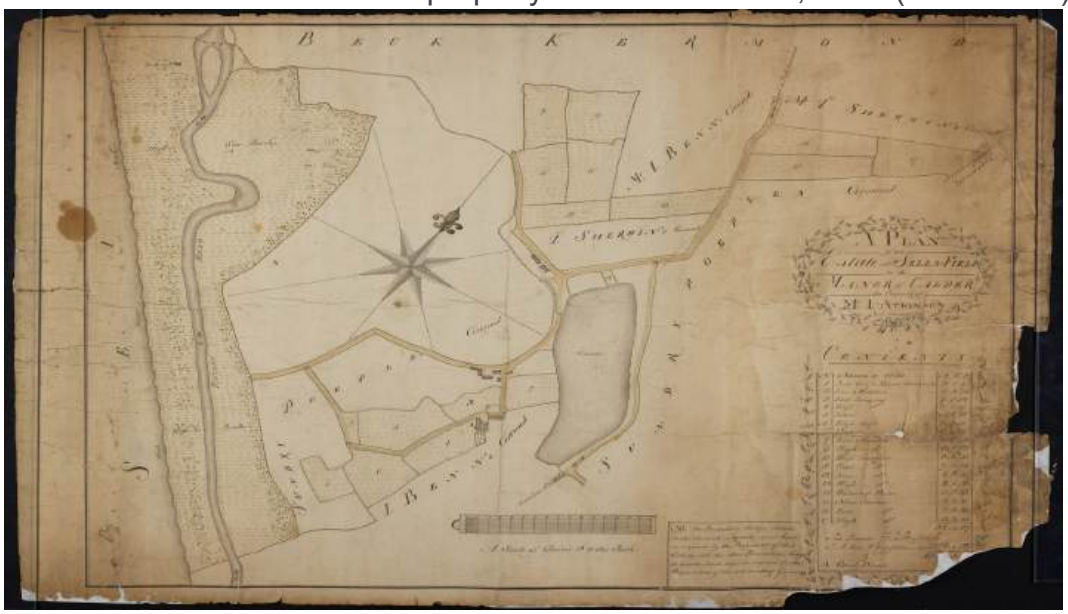
Lewthwaite family papers (additional deposit): title deeds, estate papers, correspondence, research notes, 1572-2022 (YDLEW)

Plan of an estate at Sellafield in the manor of Calder, 1793 and plans of a barn at Mid Tarn Farm, Sellafield, 19th century (YDX 803)

Additional Local Studies material including photographs and postcards of Whitehaven streets, locomotives, Haig

PH/1694 Ennerdale and Egremont

A plan of an estate at Sellafield in the manor of Calder, the property of Isaac Atkinson, 1793 (YDX 803/1)



Colliery and the 1910 Wellington Pit disaster, 1904-1986 (YDX 765)

Cumberland Morris Men: log of activities, scrapbooks, and additional photographs and newspaper cuttings, 1977-2009 (YDSO 211)

Digital copies of photographs of fire at St Nicholas Church, Whitehaven, [1971], (PH/1695)

Waberthwaite, St John and Corney, St John the Baptist, register of confirmations, 1935-2018 (YPR 46)

"Fuel Research: Physical and Chemical Survey of National Coal Resources", by the Coal Survey Laboratory to Ministry of Fuel for the Regional Controller's Survey of the Cumberland Coalfield, Feb 1945, (TNCB)

Publications including the West Cumbria Council for Voluntary Service Annual Review, 2002 (YDSO 184),

Photographs of Harrington No 10 Pit at Lowca, [1960s], (TNCB)

Digital copies of probate accounts for George and Mary Jackson of Vale View, Whitehaven, [1887-1895], (YDX 804)

Curwen family: invoices, accounts and letters, 1769-1816, (DCU)

Transcriptions of marriages (1917-1973) and burials (1918-1962) in the parish of Dean by William Bettie, parish clerk (YPR 6)

Barnardo Helpers' League register – Cockermouth area 1956- 1967, (YDX 95)

Ladysmith Pit, Whitehaven, wage slips, 1929-1930 (YDX 289)

Woodend and District Women's Institute photographs, programmes, certificates, membership cards, 1930s-2000s (YDSO 79)

Whitehaven and District Amateur Operatic Society meeting minutes, 2023-2024 and Frankenstein play programme, 2026, (YDSO 13)

J F Clark of Whitehaven, additional photographs and papers, circa 1914

YDSO 79/5/3 Cast of “The Silver Wedding “ play, Woodend WI, 1937

-1982 (YDX 563)

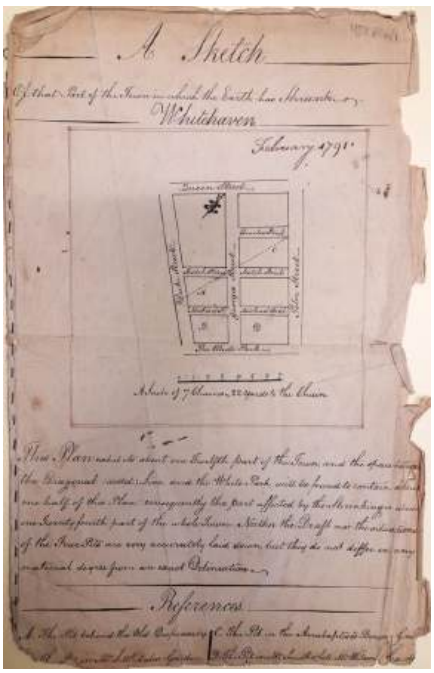
Photographs of the Steele and Cronin families of Whitehaven, [early-mid 20th century], (PH/1696)

Sketch of streets in Whitehaven town centre giving details of where the earth has shrunk and timeline of various events in English history, 1791 (YDX 806)

Cataloguing

We have taken in a collection of records of the Cumberland Morris Men (YDSO 211), which was active from 1979 to 2009 – this consists of a log book, photographs and scrapbooks of their performances. There has been a further deposit of postcards and photographs of Whitehaven, locomotives and glass plates of Wellington Pit Disaster to add to Stephen Holliday’s Local Studies collection (YDX 765). We have received an early, detailed plan of an estate at Sellafield in the Manor of Calder, 1793 (when Sellafield was just a hamlet). This is in a fragile state at present and requires some attention before we can produce the physical item in our searchroom but it has been digitised.

Some of our collections work of late has involved our digital preservation system. We’ve also been uploading thousands of digitised images of the late historian, Bernard Bradbury (YDX 310) to Preservica. His collection of photographs covers Cockermouth and the surrounding area and a wide variety of subjects. We have received our first digital accession via Preservica - some film footage featuring oral history recordings of Maryport (part of a High Street Regeneration Project for the former Allerdale Borough Council). This came in following a transfer of digitised cinefilms of Workington and Maryport, which had previously been on Allerdale’s YouTube channel. We have also catalogued a small deposit of Woodend Women’s



YDX 806/1 Sketch of Whitehaven streets 1791

Institute records and done some cataloguing of additional material for British Steel (YBSC), Harrington Harbour and Dock Board (YSHAR) and Cockermouth Heritage Group (YDSO 95).

The Arlecdon History Group collection (YDSO 209) of photographs, letters and research notes has been catalogued, under the reference YDSO 209. Work has begun to appraise and catalogue more of the Jack Lancaster collection, (YDX 129), which consists primarily of research papers and reports on the iron and steel industry in West Cumberland.

Diane Hodgson,
Archivist

Cataloguing Projects

Currently I am carrying out essential collections management of the Curwen Family estate papers (which in the long run will create greater accessibility to parts of the collection that were once not catalogued).

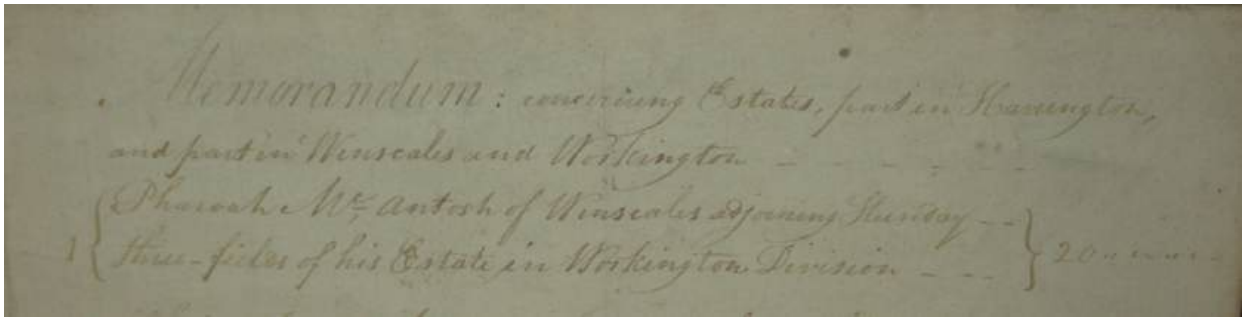
This has included cleaning documents using acid free smoke sponges, removing harmful ferrous material such as pins and staples, re-packaging items into acid free storage files and folders and cataloguing with more detailed descriptions of what the item regards.

Working with archival collections (whether hundreds of years old or more recent) Archivists can sometimes make some surprising discoveries!

One of which was when I was cleaning, re-packaging, cataloguing etc an item within the Curwen Family estate papers. This is a Memorandum concerning estates, part in Harrington, Winscales and Workington from 1801 (ref: DCU/5/902) and gives a detailed list of properties and freeholders and tenants with the annual rents they were paying. One name that appears to have a unique forename and unique spelling of a common Scottish surname (which I can imagine really made this tenant stand out in the local community at the time!) is *'Pharoh Mcantosh of Winscales adjoining Hunday three fields of his Estate in Workington Division' for £20.*

This just goes to show that to expect the unexpected when working on collections dating from the early 19th Century and would certainly be an exciting find to any descendants of Pharoh Mcantosh!'

Darren Ferrier,
Archivist



DCU 5/902/1 Pharoh Mcantosh of Winscales

Outreach

In March, we hosted another visit from Gosforth Primary School. This time 19 students came to look inside our strong room and use local history sources like maps and street directories as well as school log books and old photographs. We also had the St Benedict's A-level History students in the autumn who came along with their teacher to hear a talk on Public Health in 19th century Workington and Whitehaven in preparation for their coursework.

New staff

Whitehaven is finally back up to its full quota of staff with the addition of Darren Ferrier, Archivist, who started in November last year and Lindsay Stevenson, Archive Assistant, who joined us in April.

Trip to Muncaster

Staff visit to Muncaster

Staff were treated to a trip to Muncaster Castle in June, which was kindly offered to us by the Frost-Pennington family and their Collections Manager Melanie Grange (formerly of this parish). As well as a visit to their Weapons Hall where staff were able to release their frustrations via bow and arrow, cross bow and axe throwing, we were given a behind the scenes tour. We discussed Muncaster's holdings of archives and artefacts, their outreach offers and potential future collaboration.

From Our Volunteers

Volunteering at Cumbria Archives

Our four Archive Centres, as well as our Conservation Unit in Carlisle, can offer rewarding volunteer opportunities. These tasks vary according to the specific requirements of each location and availability of places. We caught up with two of our current volunteers to ask them a few questions about their experiences.

Q1 Who are you and which Archives Centre do you volunteer at?

We're Jna and Elaine and we volunteer at Carlisle Archives

Q2 How did you begin volunteering for the Archives?

J: A friend invited me to try being a volunteer

E: I volunteered as part of the Poor Law project with Keele University and continued after that

Q3 Which project are you currently working on?

J: I'm working on the Militia Ballot papers, lists of men who were eligible to be balloted for the militia, dating back to 1807

E: I'm also working on the militia lists and also the Crew List agreements for ships based in Maryport

Q4 What do you enjoy about volunteering?

J: Although the papers are fragile, converting the data to spreadsheets means the information is easily available for people, without too much handling of the documents

E: I enjoy spending some time with old documents. I find it intense, interesting and relaxing

Q5 Do you use the Archives for your own research?

J: Not so far, but probably in the future

E: Yes, I use the free access to Ancestry and Find My Past for family history research

Q6 Just for fun! If you could travel to another era of history, which would it be and why?

J: It would be interesting to go back to pre-1914 England, before the world changed, as women were beginning to want emancipation and before the financial crash of the 1930s

E: I don't know—I like history but I don't think I'd want to go back. Women had a hard time!

See our website for more information on volunteering with Cumbria Archives.

https://cumbriaarchives.org.uk/about-cumbria-archives/volunteers

Carmen Cid Santibañez

Dr Rob David

Carmen Eckersley, photo courtesy of the Eckersley family.

Central to the story of the Basque children at Brampton is Carmen Eckersley (née Cid Santibañez).

As a seven-year-old she came to the UK on SS *Habana* in May 1937 along with her elder brother and sister and some 4000 other children from the Basque region of northern Spain. After spending a short period in the tented camp at North Stoneham near Southampton, she and her siblings were sent to a hostel in London. Along with her brother and sister and half a dozen other children she arrived at the Basque children's hostel in Brampton in April 1938. She was adopted by the Alford family in Carlisle and went to live in their house and was also financially supported by a Methodist Women's group in Kendal. Carmen and her siblings were unable to return to Spain, and she spent most of the war years in Carlisle eventually marrying Clifford Eckersley, a Carlisle hairdresser in 1952. Carmen and Clifford made their home in Carlisle, her siblings lived in Scotland and their parents joined them in the UK after the end of the Second World War.

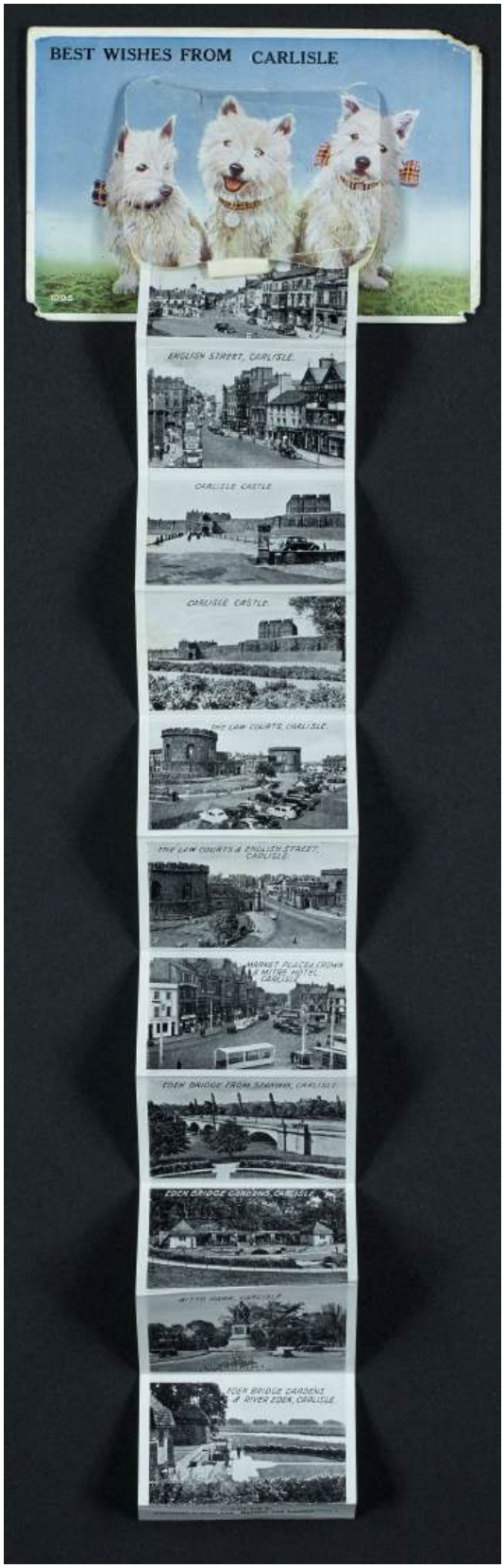
There are a number of references to Carmen and her siblings in the Roberts family archive of the Brampton children's home at Carlisle Archive Centre. Carmen, now aged 97, still lives in Carlisle supported by her children. She is certainly the last of the Basque children still living in Britain, and possibly also in Spain, who remembers the Brampton children's home and the events of 1937. As such she readily agreed to be interviewed earlier this year by Pablo San Roman from the London office of *Agence France Presse*, and her story appeared in newspapers across the world.

The story of the Basque child refugees is important and Carmen's enthusiasm to enable younger generations to learn about what happened to her and the 4000 other children who came to Britain will help to ensure that this part of European history is not forgotten. Carlisle Archive Centre, by looking after the Roberts family archive is also playing its part, as are the archivists and the student researcher from Lancaster University who took the story to Brampton Primary school earlier this year.

The Revised Edition of Happy and Safe: The Basque Child Refugees in Cumberland and Westmorland 1937-1939 by Dr Rob David is available for £5, plus postage and packaging from: Simon Martinez, c/o Basque Children's Association '37 UK, 164 Carr Road, Sheffield, S6 2WZ Email: simonmartinez1937@yahoo.com

Spotlight On...

DX 595/3 Novelty postcards



Although they've existed since 1870, postcards with an image on one side and a divided back for message and address, were not in regular use until 1902.

They became a seaside holiday staple in the 1950s and 60s, being a good way to show your friends and neighbours the wonderful time you were having. Sending pictures of sunny beaches or local landmarks was a "wish you were here" in paper form.

At first glance, this postcard from Carlisle seems to be nothing special, just a whimsical image of three cute white dogs. However, if you follow the instructions on the back "to open raise flap" then you unleash a zigzag of black and white images from around the city. We have English Street with cars driving up and down what is now a pedestrianised area, two views of Carlisle Castle and a row of cars and buses parked outside the Crown and Mitre Hotel. Clearly these are meant to show off what Carlisle has to offer.

Postcards were a cheap and efficient way to communicate and deltiology (the hobby of collecting postcards) became popular in the late 20th century. Cumbria Archives have many collections which include postcards, some like these which have not been used or others that have been used to pass messages to loved ones. Search "postcards" on CASCAT and explore over 1300 records.

Fiona Blake, Archives Assistant

Cumbria **Archives**

Opening Hours

To book an appointment, please contact the relevant Archive Centre

Barrow

Open Wednesday to Friday: 9.30am to 1pm, 2pm to 5pm

(closed 1pm to 2pm)

Email: barrow.archives@cumberland.gov.uk

Carlisle

Open Wednesday to Friday: 9.30am to 1pm, 2pm to 5pm

(closed 1pm to 2pm)

Email: carlisle.archives@cumberland.gov.uk

Kendal

From September Open Wednesday to Friday 10am to 4pm*

Email: kendal.archives@cumberland.gov.uk

Whitehaven

Open Wednesday to Friday: 9.30am to 12.30pm; 1.30pm to 4.30pm

(closed 12.30pm to 1.30pm)

Email: whitehaven.archives@cumberland.gov.uk

*For current opening times and procedures for ordering documents see cumbriaarchives.org.uk/news

Cumberland Council

Westmorland & Furness Council

Working for **Cumberland Council** and **Westmorland & Furness Council**

cumbriaarchives.org.uk